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General Assembly

Sixty-third session

Official Records

11th plenary meeting
Friday, 26 September 2008, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Hausiku (Namibia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Address by Mr. Filip Vujanović, President of Montenegro

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Montenegro.

Mr. Filip Vujanović, President of Montenegro, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Filip Vujanović, President of Montenegro, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Vujanović: It is my honour and pleasure to welcome the election of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I wish him great success in carrying out that complex, responsible and challenging task. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude and great respect to Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President at the sixty-second session, for successfully leading the Assembly during his tenure. In addition, I would like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and to emphasize our full support for his efforts to strengthen the position of the United Nations as a valuable factor in resolving the issues on the ever-expanding international agenda.

Now, if the Assembly will permit me, I should like to continue in my native language.

(*spoke in Montenegrin; interpretation provided by the delegation*)

As the youngest United Nations Member, Montenegro has left its mark on the international scene. It gained its statehood centuries ago and democratically restored it in 2006. For us, statehood represents political freedom, but also political responsibility. Both are qualities that we look for and find in the United Nations: in the spirit of its Charter, and in the promotion of mutual respect and equality among nations and peoples.

Multilateralism lies at the core of the international system and inspires strong motivation and commitment. That is why the United Nations provides a reliable framework for maintaining international peace and security, strengthening democracy, protecting human rights and freedoms, respecting international law and fostering the economic and social development of all States.

Today, the world Organization is going through a process of necessary reform prompted by great achievements, but also by some setbacks, and even failures. Montenegro supports a process of pragmatic reform at the United Nations. As a small State, we are particularly interested in strengthening the authority of the General Assembly and other main United Nations bodies.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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The Security Council lies at the heart of the overall reform process and needs to be transformed taking into account equitable regional representation, transparency and improvement in its working methods. Montenegro supports intergovernmental negotiations. We are undoubtedly faced with a very challenging and complex process, but one to which Montenegro will strive to contribute.

Respect for human rights and freedoms, improvement of minority and faith-based rights and the strengthening of good-neighbourly relations will continue to be the foundation of our national stability, as well of regional stability. Our engagement at national, regional and international levels is therefore focused on the rule of law and the fight against corruption and organized crime.

This year we mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration is still vital and applicable. We are fully dedicated to its implementation and determined to uphold its values and principles. In support of that, Montenegro has presented its candidature for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2012-2015.

As the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals represents one of the key objectives of United Nations policy, it is only natural that small and developing States, such as Montenegro, should be resolved to make a concerted effort towards those goals. Aware of all the challenges in implementing that agenda, Montenegro shares the Secretary-General's opinion that yesterday's high-level event contributed positively to the increased commitment to realize the goals that have been set.

Challenges that we are facing today, including political problems, hotspots, blatant violations of human rights and freedoms, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, environmental degradation and climate change, require an adequate response and decisive action. We believe that no effective or lasting response is possible without joint action by the entire international community.

Countries in transition, such as our own, have relevant experience and are strongly motivated to offer continuous support to the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, in the light of the forthcoming International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Doha. Economic challenges faced by countries in transition affect the dynamics and quality of the way we tackle other issues, thus making the implementation of the Millennium Declaration imperative. Therefore, the development needs and priorities of the African countries, discussed at length during the 22 September high-level meeting, require urgent global solidarity and support.

Montenegro fully supports United Nations efforts to resolve the problems caused by the energy crisis, especially rising food prices worldwide. We also fully support the intention of the Secretary-General and of the United Nations to focus the attention of the international community on vital issues such as food prices and food security, in addition to the issues of climate change and the MDGs. The reason behind this is obvious: everyone is affected and is hence committed to solving those problems.

In the light of that, we agree with the proposed United Nations action in the multilateral framework. We commend the recent adoption of the Rome Declaration on World Food Security, and strongly believe that integrated international action is the best response.

As an ecologically concerned State, Montenegro cherishes an interactive relationship between the environmental aspects of the protection of natural resources, on the one hand, and the production and distribution of organic food on the other hand. Furthermore, Montenegro encourages the creation of an international trade environment that favours small-scale producers and developing countries. Public-private partnerships on specific projects, as one form of cooperation between my Government and United Nations agencies in the field of energy efficiency, are also of special importance for us.

Montenegro has many reasons to be satisfied with the dynamics and results of its ongoing reform processes. Promotion of democracy, equality and tolerance among States and peoples has been and will continue to be our political doctrine. We are motivated by a desire for stability and economic and cultural development, and we demonstrate this in practice in our relationships with neighbours and regional partners. It is also a basis for Montenegro's progress in European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Our European Union (EU) and NATO agenda is based on the principles of democracy, a functional market economy, efficient institutions and the rule of

law. In the process of integration, special emphasis is placed on the dynamics and time frame in which our progress is being achieved — in all areas, including political, legislative, economic and public administration reform.

This year, Montenegro joined the Union for the Mediterranean. We appreciate the support offered by our EU partners and other members of that significant initiative. Montenegro stands ready to make its contribution and to take an active part in the revitalization of the projects within that initiative.

Montenegro is taking a step forward in its security policy, centred on multilateral cooperation, with the aim of creating a legislative framework for the deployment of our police, military and civilian personnel to United Nations peacekeeping missions. Montenegro contributed to similar missions more than 100 years ago, in the nineteenth century, and we are now preparing to implement our commitment again in order to meet the current needs for fostering peace and democracy.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the commitment of Montenegro to contribute to the strengthening and promotion of the United Nations in our common effort to identify adequate responses to multifaceted challenges the world faces today.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Montenegro for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Filip Vujanović, President of Montenegro, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. René Garcia Préval, President of the Republic of Haiti

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Haiti.

Mr. René Garcia Préval, President of the Republic of Haiti, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. René Garcia Préval, President of the Republic of Haiti, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Préval (*spoke in French*): Just one year ago (see A/62/PV.6), I recalled before this Assembly that I was bringing the words of a people who for 200 years have experienced extreme suffering as a result of all kinds of material privation and complete vulnerability in the face of natural risks and disasters.

At that time, I hardly thought that I would find myself here again one year later against the backdrop of the image of hundreds of children, women and the elderly swept away by floodwaters, hundreds of thousands of citizens suddenly finding themselves without shelter, tens of thousands of tons of agricultural harvest destroyed in a few hours, not to mention the incalculable damage to basic infrastructure such as communication networks, art works, irrigation systems, the electricity grid, the water system and other structures.

I am pointing out that those catastrophic events occurred just four months after the first angry demonstrations of the population against the explosion in food prices, reactions that would be repeated on an almost global scale, as though to express a collective cry of the poor regarding what was happening beyond just a global food crisis, as the rejection of an order for which the poor had too long been the only ones to pay the cost.

The damage caused four consecutive hurricanes in less than two months has set Haiti back several years. Those hurricanes sorely test our capacity to resist, particularly when it must be borne in mind that all those victims, and their families, and all those businesses, large or small, have to fend for themselves while they wait for the State, and the State alone, to help them to get back on their feet or return to business. There are no adequate market insurance systems to compensate for the losses arising from that enormous damage.

I cannot thank the Secretary-General enough for the great outpouring of sympathy that the United Nations system has shown towards the people of Haiti following those disasters. I can hardly express sufficient thanks for the mobilization organized by the United Nations agencies on the ground to bring help to the most vulnerable and assist the affected families to tackle the most urgent problems.

How can I thank the many friendly countries that so quickly mobilized their own resources and logistics

to come to the aid of the Haitians? How can we express our gratitude in the light of those expressions of compassion and the numerous initiatives of solidarity coming from civil society and the private sector in those same friendly countries?

Just as dark clouds have a silver lining, how could I not recall that huge solidarity movement from within even our country, involving civil society and non-governmental organizations, not to forget, of course, the millions of Haitians living abroad, in an unprecedented mobilization, all striving to work together in synergy with the local authorities and specialized agencies of the central Government.

Despite the suffering that the Haitian people are enduring today because of the cumulative effect of the disasters that befell them, I cannot help turning my thoughts to our neighbours, countries such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, our brother nations in the Caribbean Community and even some States on the southern coast of the United States that have also suffered considerable damage as a result of those first hurricanes of the season — and I stress, the first hurricanes of the season. How can we not remember either the sight of the disasters that have struck India, Bangladesh and other regions of the Asian continent?

However, beyond those calamities that we could, quite easily, attribute to nature, how can we ignore other disasters for which we humans are directly responsible through war and the destruction that we bring about with such determination in various areas of the world? To all citizens of those countries affected by the violence of men and by natural disasters, to their families and their representatives here at this Assembly, on behalf of the Haitian people I address my best wishes for courage in their reconstruction efforts and in their quest for peace and happiness. And I can assure them of our feeling of solidarity and fraternity in that effort.

While I salute that huge wave of generosity towards my country and am grateful for that solidarity, recognizing it was necessary for the immediate needs of those affected, I cannot fail to draw attention to the concerns that it raises for Haitians. I am worried because I know how deep-rooted our problems are. I am concerned because I am apprehensive about the time when that solidarity, exhausted in the first wave of humanitarian compassion, will leave us, as always, alone — really alone — in the face of new disasters, to see as if in a ritual, the same mobilization exercises.

I am concerned because the Haitians risk finding themselves alone in ensuring the only real task that needs undertaking today: that of rebuilding the country. We must rebuild its production capacity and social fabric and give our young people a new dream, the poor new hope, and our citizens of all political leanings and all social strata new confidence. We need a reconstruction project thought out in a systematic approach and able to count on genuine solidarity to mobilize the necessary resources for its implementation.

That is why we are sceptical with regard to imported food aid and the traditional way in which it is carried out. We have to break this paradigm of charity in our approach to international cooperation, for charity has never helped any country to emerge from underdevelopment.

The Native Americans that lived in our country and the Africans that replaced them helped a large part of humanity to amass its current wealth. We are simple workers who have been moulded by hard labour and blessed with a keen sense for commerce and creating businesses.

If the international community wants to do something useful with Haitians, that would be to help us use our potential. The liberalization of trade can be beneficial to humanity, particularly to the poor, who have the ability to produce for a greater market. But this liberalization must be done without hypocrisy or duping anyone. It must be carried out on the basis of clear, transparent rules that are the same for everyone, and the powers that promote them must begin by respecting those rules themselves.

Setting up and maintaining genuine productive capacities and trading under fair conditions are the initial conditions that would enable poor people to escape from the chains of poverty. The day when development aid aligns itself with these criteria, the fight against poverty and hunger will really turn a corner in this world of ours.

We will then see that the poor are not as poor as all that. We will see that they have available to them assets that political parties, institutions and cooperation programmes are not sufficiently making use of. We all realize that the lands and the unregistered houses the

poor possess and the informal businesses they are involved in are also capital that can legitimately circulate in the economy and participate in the creation of new wealth.

This system simply has to be formalized. And we have to give property title to those who own those lands and those houses. We also have to formalize this trade. I have begun discussions with some of our partners to move quickly to a thorough evaluation of new needs created by the damage to our infrastructure with a view to developing a comprehensive reconstruction plan, which will serve as the conductor for cooperation efforts with our country.

Last Tuesday, on the occasion of the opening of the general debate of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly (5th meeting), I listened very carefully to the opening statement of the President. The creation of the United Nations was an important conquest in the history of mankind's struggle to find a remedy for poverty and to build a world of peace based on equality and respect for everyone's rights. The Organization remains the privileged place for debating the problems of our world and for allowing the voices of the poor and of those left behind to be heard. We cannot allow its work to be hindered by its inability to take into account the voice of the majority. We cannot allow its agencies to exist only for themselves, relegating to second place their primary mission of service.

I agree with the President that our Organization needs profound reform so that it becomes more effective, more transparent and genuinely democratic. If it fails to accomplish this, the United Nations risks being resented by the small and derided by the big. We do not need that in these difficult and uncertain days, when our planet is being put to a severe test by a combination of crises of all kinds, multidimensional crises whose solution will depend on our collective capacity to deal with them effectively, equitably and with solidarity.

The announced high-level dialogue on the democratization of the United Nations, if approached with courage and determination, will put us on the road to changing its structures and its way of functioning. Such reforms can only be a source of inspiration and a model for small countries, stricken like us by long-standing difficulties, for ending institutional fragility and arriving at political stability and a fully functioning rule of law.

This Assembly is among those to whom fate has entrusted the destiny of our planet. The world that is being remoulded around us is a world in which wealth and poverty can no longer be confined within closed spaces, separated by impassable borders. Climate change has no borders. Viruses and diseases are elusive undocumented visitors. The hunger of the poor is a threat and will continue to threaten the happiness of the rich.

The question that we have to collectively ask ourselves today is this: will we perish together because we were not able to take up our mission together with courage, or will we agree to mobilize for a new plan for humanity under a new form of governance, one that is responsible and based on solidarity, in order to save our beautiful planet, and to give our children the opportunity to build a better world?

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Haiti for the statement he has just made.

Mr. René Garcia Préval, President of the Republic of Haiti, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Kalkot Matas Kelekele, President of the Republic of Vanuatu

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Vanuatu.

Mr. Kalkot Matas Kelekele, President of the Republic of Vanuatu, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Kalkot Matas Kelekele, President of the Republic of Vanuatu, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Kelekele: It gives me extreme pleasure to extend my congratulations to Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election. I read with keen interest the United Nations news report of His Excellency's election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I note well what he said on 4 June this year, following his election (see A/62/PV.99): for

the United Nations to be more effective, it must be what its name implies — an organization of nations united, not nations dispersed or, even worse, subjugated. Our nations must be united in the struggle to democratize the United Nations, united in their determination to preserve the world for the sake of present and future generations from the scourge of war among Member States, and from acts of aggression.

I congratulate him and the Vice-Presidents on their election to lead the General Assembly. I believe that Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann's election, as a leader in his own right, as a Christian priest and as a God-fearing servant of the Republic of Nicaragua, to the presidency of the Assembly is timely in these challenging days.

May I also extend my appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim for his successful leadership of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session.

I am deeply honoured to be the first President of the Republic of Vanuatu to address this Assembly, since it is the first time that a Head of State of Vanuatu has attended the United Nations since our admission to the Organization in 1981. In this respect, please allow me also to extend my congratulations to the Secretary-General on his appointment and on his keen commitment to revitalizing the United Nations.

I am humbled and privileged to stand before the sixty-third General Assembly to share some words and thoughts on behalf of the people of Vanuatu. Twenty-seven years ago, on 15 September 1981, Vanuatu became the 155th Member of the United Nations family. On that same day, our first and longest-serving Prime Minister and the founding father of our nation — the late doctor, chief and priest, Father Walter Hadye Lini — spoke to the Assembly in the name of the people of Vanuatu, with pride, humility and gratitude. He acknowledged the support of the United Nations through the active concern and assistance of the Special Committee of 24 on Decolonization.

Father Lini said that, because of that, the United Nations has a very special place in the affections and esteem of the people of Vanuatu. He also expressed our nation's debt of gratitude to a great number of the countries represented in the Assembly, which assisted our nation's difficult progress towards independence.

In the same spirit I call on the United Nations to continue to pursue the interests of those countries and peoples that continue their struggle for freedom and to win a permanent place among us. The United Nations is the Organization of the family of independent sovereign nations and peoples of the world. It must stand firm to promote peace, security and equality throughout the world.

The world's majority has accepted the phenomenon of climate change as a reality and no longer an academic theory. From Kyoto to Bali, that observation has been consistently repeated.

The increase in the occurrence of natural calamities and their destructive powers are a stark reminder of the increasing vulnerability of today's global environment, where nature respects no boundaries. The severe impact of natural disasters will constantly remind us of the harsh experiences and critical development challenges confronting many of the island countries.

I join my colleagues from the Pacific region in our call to the international community for more concerted action in addressing climate change as a security issue. Unless the present trend of global warming is reversed through sincere and concerted international action through the United Nations framework, some of our Pacific colleague nations will be submerged. If such a tragedy should happen, then the United Nations and its members will have failed in their first and most basic duty to a Member and its innocent people, as stated in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations.

In 2003, Vanuatu's economic growth rebounded to 3.2 per cent from -2.6 per cent and -7.4 per cent in 2001 and 2002 respectively. Continued growth was recorded in 2004 and 2005, with a published growth rate of 5.5 per cent and 6.8 per cent respectively, driven mainly by growth in the service sector and, in particular, tourism.

As members know, a dimension of the least developed country (LDC) status is the tri-annual review by the Economic and Social Council of the list of least developed countries with the view to recommending countries for graduation out of or inclusion in the group of least developed countries. It is in that regard that I wish to bring to the attention of our Assembly to an area of serious concern to the Governments of Vanuatu and of several other small island developing States of the Pacific.

It is our view that the current graduation rule poses a systemic issue that could easily be resolved if Member States were willing to recognize its importance to countries such as Vanuatu and other Pacific nations. The decision to graduate a country from LDC status, in our view, must imply the recognition of undisputed sustainable socio-economic progress in the country. The criteria the United Nations relies on to arrive at a decision are by and large sound and fair, and I will briefly recall them: first, one expects the country to enjoy a higher income per capita; secondly, the country's human assets or human capital is expected to have made significant progress; and thirdly, the country ought to have achieved greater resilience to external shocks — in other words, to have become less vulnerable economically.

A country is recommended for graduation if it meets any two of those three criteria. In other words, the graduation rule implicitly postulates that all three criteria are equally important. If a country, no matter how vulnerable, has risen to a level of per capita income above $900, which is not difficult in a small State, and enjoys improved human capital, it is assumed that that country has become structurally stronger and is now ready to pursue its development efforts without LDC treatment.

Vanuatu and other Pacific countries believe it is critical to recognize the vulnerability criterion as the paramount criterion and accordingly give it prominence. It is indeed the only criterion that ultimately matters to small and vulnerable States such as ours.

Vanuatu and other Pacific countries are deemed eligible for graduation on the basis of their improved per capita income and improved human assets. They remain among the most vulnerable countries in the world, both economically and environmentally, and that must be recognized by the United Nations. Our countries may graduate from LDC status because they have achieved a higher per capita income performance, even though the sustainability of that income is constantly challenged by the high vulnerability of island economies to shocks such as frequent cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and sea-level rise.

The recent hurricanes in this part of the world remind us of the destructive impact that such natural phenomena have on the development process of island countries and LDCs. Members may be aware that the "island paradox" — when relative prosperity overshadows high vulnerability — continues to be disregarded, despite the repeated call for a reform of the graduation rule that would make low vulnerability a sine qua non or compulsory criterion.

This is not the first time that Vanuatu, in addressing the Assembly, has called on the United Nations to reform the way least developed countries are identified. Some 11 years ago, in 1997, a former Prime Minister called for an urgent review of the LDC graduation criteria, which brought the United Nations to introduce a vulnerability criterion, a fair and sound move on the part of the Organization.

I reiterate Vanuatu's plea for a reform of the graduation rule and wish to point out that the reform we are calling for is a mild and reasonable one, one that could easily be adopted by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly without altering the main components of the established methodology. We believe the time has come for the United Nations to come full circle by making the same criterion a superior one, so that no highly vulnerable country is forcibly reclassified and bound to lose the level of concessionary support of which it remains in need. Such a reform would do justice to countries that have not achieved the implied structural progress.

We are also urging experts from the Committee for Development Policy to seriously consider the merit of undertaking in-country visits to assess first-hand the development experiences of affected countries rather than making conclusions on statistical indicators that are anomalous and theoretical.

In 2004, the Government of Vanuatu established its Millennium Development Goals (MDG) National Committee, which adopted a plan of action to implement the MDGs. In its first report, in 2005, the MDG National Committee concluded that Vanuatu's outlook for the achievement of the MDGs or their respective targets was poor to fair. That can be attributed to poor linkages to Government priorities and inadequate allocation of resources to implement the plan of action.

Nevertheless, we are pleased to report that in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, Vanuatu is endeavouring to put in place mechanisms to operationalize its sector strategies by identifying key issues and the required interventions to address them, and defining the coverage of

interventions and their costing. We believe that, if we succeed in doing that, we will be able to accelerate progress on the MDGs and that, come 2015, Vanuatu will be able to provide a more positive report to the Assembly.

At the Millennium Summit, the then Prime Minister of Vanuatu, The Honourable Barak Sope Maautamate, called on the United Nations to review the legality of the United Nations action in 1962 to endorse the New York Agreement to administer the so-called Act of Free Choice over West Papua.

The Charter of the United Nations espouses the principles that continue to guide the Organization's efforts in the process of self-determination. That manifestation calls for recognition and respect for the fundamental and inalienable rights of peoples and territories still under colonial rule to determine their future. We cannot champion democracy if the United Nations continues to hang this blanket of silence over the case of West Papua, in which the United Nations itself takes part.

An issue of extreme national importance is the question of submissions to the United Nations on the extension of continental shelves. As with some other smaller nations, technical capacity constraints and financial resources have inhibited our progress on submissions, and therefore we are requesting that the United Nations consider extending the deadline for submissions to enable countries like Vanuatu to participate fully in the process. We call for the understanding of our development partners and urge them to consider providing funding for that important exercise.

A side issue to the question of the extension of continental shelves in relation to Vanuatu is that there is a dispute between Vanuatu and the French Republic, the former colonial authority, concerning our continental shelves to the south of the nation.

On the question of reforms at the United Nations, we believe that, in order to make the Organization truly democratic, reforms are essential to make the Security Council more representative of the membership as a whole. In that respect, we believe that Japan and India deserve permanent membership.

At this critical moment of global crisis, I recall the aphorism underpinning the foundations of the United Nations. It is taken from the book of the great prophet Micah and is engraved on the walls of United Nations Headquarters:

> "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (*The Holy Bible, Micah, 4:3*).

It is no coincidence that the theme for this Assembly is a much clearer manifestation of those prophetic words, which the United Nations has neglected over the years. As one of the smallest Members of the United Nations family of nations, Vanuatu reaffirms its commitment to building global peace and security. We also remain committed to supporting United Nations peacekeeping missions as our modest contribution to that worthy cause.

Finally, we welcome 2009 as the International Year of Reconciliation. We all hope and pray that it will be a time for real compromises and political goodwill. We encourage all members of our family of nations to approach 2009 with open hearts. If we are to turn the tide of tension and animosity, we must have the courage to reconcile our differences and come together in those dimensions that will enhance this noble Organization's role in peacebuilding and development.

In closing, I would like to express the Government of Vanuatu's gratitude to all our development partners who have generously contributed to Vanuatu's development efforts. In particular, we wish to thank Australia, China, the European Union, New Zealand, Japan, the United States of America and France. We would also like to acknowledge the support of other partners, including India, Turkey, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia and Canada, as well as such multilateral institutions as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, and other United Nations agencies.

Mr. Baugh (Jamaica), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We are living in perilous times. In our Father's hands were we created, and to the hands of the leaders of the world He has entrusted the responsibility to ensure a world safe and just for all His peoples and children. The world's destiny is in our hands. That must be our inspiration.

May God bless the United Nations. May God bless the sixty-third session of the General Assembly. May God bless us all.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Vanuatu for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Kalkot Matas Kelekele, President of the Republic of Vanuatu, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Gabriel Ntisezerana, Second Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Second Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi.

Mr. Gabriel Ntisezerana, Second Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Gabriel Ntisezerana, Second Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Ntisezerana (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers, on behalf of His Excellency Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi, and our entire delegation, in offering our warmest congratulations to Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his outstanding election to the presidency. We congratulate the other members of the Bureau as well.

We would also like to pay well-deserved tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for the skill and wisdom with which he guided the work of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. We also take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Ban Ki-Moon once again on the skill and dynamism with which he is guiding our Organization. We would also like to pay special tribute to his tireless devotion to the cause of peace and development in Burundi as we attempt to consolidate peace and stability.

Finally we wish to thank the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi.

The sixty-third session of the General Assembly is taking place at a time when the people of Burundi are at last enjoying the end of the war between the Government army and the Parti Libération du Peuple Hutu-Forces nationale de libération (PALIPEHUTU-FNL). The representatives of both parties have been sitting at the same table since May, seeking to identify the ways and means to implement the Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement signed in Tanzania on 7 September 2006. Allow us to also thank the international community, the United Nations, the African Union and the Regional Peace Initiative on Burundi for their participation in the return of the leaders of the PALIPEHUTU movement to Burundi. We also take this opportunity to call on that movement to commit itself resolutely to the peace process, in particular by ending its practice of forcing local populations to supply its fighters. For its part, the Government of Burundi reaffirms that it will spare no effort to ensure progress in the peace process.

This session is taking place three years after the establishment of democratically elected institutions in our country, and it is the first time in our history that an elected Government has lasted more than three years. This is an important stage in democracy. The people in general and the Government in particular welcome that milestone.

Thanks particularly to the support of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Government of Burundi has just launched, throughout the country, dialogue frameworks between the socio-political partners of Burundi: the leaders of political parties, members of Parliament, civil society and the media. They exchange views on the current challenges to our country in order to reach a consensus on the way democracy should function in Burundi. In the framework of promoting a sound justice system and national reconciliation, the Government will soon organize nationwide elections on the machinery for transitional justice.

Our Government is firmly committed to respecting human rights in all their forms. That is no easy task in a country that recently emerged from a civil war that lasted more than 15 years. Nevertheless, a number of measures have been taken and others are under way. An independent national human rights commission and a national children's forum will soon be launched. Additionally, a new criminal code providing for severe punishment for gender-based

violence is before Parliament, which is now up and running normally. In the same vein, the Government has established human rights focal points in all ministerial departments and is providing training in that area and in peace education.

I note that in Burundi, security is generally good throughout our national territory, but we are encountering certain forms of insecurity linked to attacks and killings as a result of armed robbery and land disputes. In order to control that phenomenon, the Government has begun to disarm the civil population. That is a very important and difficult measure, particularly because there is a large number of weapons in private hands. We are convinced that, unless those weapons are taken out of circulation and destroyed, peace and security will always be under threat. We therefore count on the support of our development partners to recover all weapons and munitions, particularly once the PALIPEHUTU-FNL combatants have completed the integration process.

Indeed, although our country is arduously recovering from the devastating effects of civil war, its gross domestic product remains among the lowest in the world. The purchasing power of the population has fallen and inflation has risen apace, particularly given the international phenomenon of the generalized increase in the price of food and oil products.

In a different vein, we recently organized a national housing and population census that will provide us with reliable data, without which it would be difficult to carry out sustainable development projects. The results of the census will allow the Government to improve the drafting of school and health policies, to which we pay particular attention, as evidenced by the measures already taken to establish free health care for children under the age of five and women at childbirth, as well as free basic education.

The Government has negotiated and launched macroeconomic and structural reforms that our development partners support. Those reforms are aimed at macroeconomic stabilization, the privatization of State enterprises, and bank and monetary management that is compatible with sustainable growth.

The Government is determined to fight corruption and tax fraud, and to promote real transparency in the management of public wealth. Allow me to recall that an anti-corruption law has been enacted and that an anti-corruption brigade is now operating. The public oversight body is playing its role and we welcome the considerable contribution made by civil society organizations.

Burundi welcomes the ratification of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region by nine members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. We will, of course, pursue measures to ensure that all member States ratify the Pact.

We recall that Burundi joined the East African Community (EAC) in July 2007. As I address this Assembly, nine Burundian members of Parliament represent my country in the Legislative Assembly of the Community. That integration represents certain challenges for the people and Government of Burundi, particularly with respect to the imminent creation of a common market and a customs union, to culminate in the establishment of a political federation. We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the States members of EAC, which understand the difficulties facing a country emerging from conflict, such as Burundi, and have implemented measures to assist our integration. Of course, we also count on the support of our development partners to help us in all areas of integration that we consider to be strategic for the political stability and development of the countries of the subregion.

Maintaining peace and security is a multidimensional task subject to the many challenges that our Organization is called upon to address. These include conflict prevention and resolution, combating terrorism, combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and combating poverty, hunger and disease, including the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The United Nations is mobilizing many efforts and resources to meet those challenges. While it is true that considerable progress has been achieved, our Organization still has much to do, because the way forward is still long. We should also point out that bloody conflicts and hotbeds of tension remain, including in Somalia, Darfur, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East, et cetera. Terrorism is gaining ground all the time and is causing more death than conventional war. But we should not be discouraged. On the contrary, our Organization must demonstrate the capacity to prevent this type of conflict and provide effective remedies for the ills threatening humanity.

In the name of international solidarity, Burundi has decided to make its modest contribution towards resolving some of those crises, by providing military observers and police officers in Darfur and Côte d'Ivoire, and to military peacekeeping contingents in Somalia in the framework of operations established by the African Union.

Burundi enthusiastically welcomed the global challenge represented by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were adopted in 2000 and reaffirmed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (resolution 60/1). We are pleased to report that, through its policy of free primary education and health care for children under five years and women in childbirth, Burundi is achieving successes that deserve support. While thanking those countries and peoples who have been of such great help to us since the launch of the policy in 2005, we would like to call for international solidarity, because the policy requires considerable Government resources that our country cannot acquire on its own.

Indeed, the World Solidarity Fund for the promotion of social and human development and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria do exist, but unfortunately, despite those initiatives the results are still modest. We therefore appeal to developed countries that have not yet done so to keep their promise to allocate 0.7 per cent of gross national income to official development assistance.

Special attention should be given to problems including putting order into the international financial markets, the need to increase investment in Africa, the rational management of water and energy resources, technology transfer, international trade agreements, climate change and the management of toxic waste.

It is more urgent than ever to harmonize the procedures and instruments for achieving our common objectives, including efforts to counteract hunger, reduce poverty worldwide and to ensure peacebuilding. Otherwise, we will witness the persistence of phenomena including the tragedy of clandestine emigration, the brain drain, heightened crime and other ills.

In closing, I wish to say that we hope that a minimum of political will and strengthened international solidarity will enable the United Nations to find appropriate solutions to the scourges affecting our era. Long live international solidarity. Long live the United Nations.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Second Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Gabriel Ntisezerana, Second Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Mr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Ahmed (Bangladesh): Let me begin by congratulating Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his well-deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his very effective leadership in promoting global peace, security and development.

I take this opportunity to deliver this statement also on behalf of the least developed countries (LDCs). This has been a difficult year for many LDCs, amid rising food prices and a looming economic slowdown. But we have remained resolute in confronting the crisis in a spirit of mutual understanding, support and cooperation, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

My statement today will address three interrelated issues: food security, democracy and development. These issues are inextricably linked to one another and are of fundamental importance to the welfare of the citizens of Bangladesh as well as other LDCs.

We have witnessed during the course of this year an extraordinary rise in food and energy prices, which

has undermined the food security of many least developed economies. This experience should strengthen our resolve to look for long-term solutions leading to a world free of hunger. In the twenty-first century, food security for all citizens in the world must be acknowledged not just as a development imperative, but as a moral imperative. Each and every human life is sacred, and it is our collective duty to provide adequate food and nutrition to people throughout the world.

The recent global rise in food prices has been acutely felt in Bangladesh, even though imports account for a very small percentage of our total cereal consumption. Domestic rice prices spiked by nearly 60 per cent during the year through February 2008, against the backdrop of two devastating floods and a tropical cyclone that destroyed one of our key harvests. For a country like Bangladesh, where roughly 40 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line and where poor households spend as much as 70 per cent of their income on food items, such a steep increase in food prices has had significant adverse effects on food security, poverty alleviation and human development.

Food insecurity can disrupt the core of a democratic polity and derail its development priorities. The cost of food insecurity is measured not only by deprivation, but also by increased instability, which can be very costly for a society. While the free market remains an incomparably powerful tool for the efficient allocation of resources, markets are often imperfect, and no Government can stand idle and hope that the private sector will resolve a food crisis. Making food available to all, and at affordable prices, remains a cardinal responsibility of all Governments. In Bangladesh, we took this responsibility very seriously and delivered rice to our citizens through a public distribution system, in an effort to ensure that no one went to bed hungry.

Soon after assuming office in January 2007, our Government announced a road map for holding a truly democratic and meaningful election. That was no easy task, as decades of corruption had seriously undermined both our democracy and our economy. Corruption's ill effects corroded our vital public institutions, and the cost was ultimately borne by the ordinary citizens of Bangladesh, who could ill afford it. My Government is determined to ensure that corruption does not imperil the rights of the underprivileged and that, in future, our democracy ensures the good of all Bangladeshis. Our fight against corruption has been the first step in a long and difficult process, and we believe that the work will continue under the auspices of the Independent Anti-Corruption Commission, which was created as an institutional bulwark against corruption. Legal action was initiated against corrupt individuals, but we never compromised due process and judicial independence.

The foundation of a democracy rests on a compact between the State and its citizens. That begins by ensuring that each and every eligible citizen can vote, freely and without fear, and that each and every vote is counted. To that end, my Government has completed the monumental task of electronically registering over 80 million voters with photographs and fingerprints. That was achieved in just 11 months and is a feat that I believe is without precedent anywhere in the world. Our Election Commission trained over 500,000 election workers, deployed over 10,000 laptop computers, webcams and fingerprint scanners and set up over 90,000 registration centres to ensure that every eligible voter could have his or her photograph and fingerprints digitally captured. Multiple layers of safeguards were put in place to ensure that the new voters list was flawless.

In addition to creating a world-class photo voters list, we issued national identity cards to all those who registered. The Election Commission, with the newfound independent authority granted to it by our Government, completed that task in record speed with the support of the Bangladesh army. Our armed services personnel — many of whom have shown their deep and abiding commitment to the ideals of the United Nations through their service in United Nations peacekeeping operations — provided critical logistical support. Their experience, we believe, could be invaluable to supporting and strengthening democracy in post-conflict environments. Our success with the voters list was the result not just of civil-military cooperation, but also international cooperation. We are deeply appreciative of the technical assistance of the United Nations Development Programme for that project and the financial support of our development partners.

An election is only the first pillar of democratic governance. During the past 20 months, my Government has relentlessly worked to shore up democracy's other pillars. We have made the judiciary

fully independent. My Government has established the National Human Rights Commission to protect and promote the fundamental rights of all our citizens. We have enacted a right to information law, which will help provide the transparency that is necessary to a well-functioning democracy. We have, in consultation with the political parties, amended and strengthened the Representation of People's Order, under which forthcoming elections will be held. That law and regulations under it will require the registration of political parties for elections, ensure intra-party democracy and implement campaign finance reforms that will limit the influence of corrupt money in our political system.

Just last month, the Bangladesh Election Commission organized the successful holding of some local and mayoral elections. That marked a new beginning in our electoral process, and our citizens were able to exercise their franchise without undue influence of money or muscle power. The elections were held without disruption and drew an unprecedented number of voters. Let me reiterate here that my Government is fully committed to holding free and fair parliamentary elections on 18 December 2008, as announced last week. We are confident that all political parties will participate in the elections.

Few nations face the challenges that we face in Bangladesh for mere survival. Our development gains, achieved through the work of years and decades, can be wiped out in a matter of hours. One cyclone can push hundreds of thousands of people back below the poverty line. Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to climate change, given that we are a low-lying delta in one of the highest rainfall regions of the world. There is growing concern that an irreversible climatic shift will displace tens of millions of our people. By some estimates, a one-metre sea-level rise would submerge about one third of the total area of Bangladesh. Given our population and its vulnerabilities, that would result in the greatest humanitarian crisis in history. Inaction is simply no longer an option. It is nothing less than a basic moral imperative that countries that have contributed little to this crisis, such as Bangladesh, not be left alone and unsupported to suffer the most from its consequences.

Adaptation is necessary, but it may not be sufficient to cope with the unavoidable impacts of climate change. Countries like Bangladesh will face the worst consequences in the absence of a legally binding commitment on mitigation. International efforts to minimize emission levels should not, however, disproportionately tax poorer nations. We must have guaranteed access to appropriate mitigation technologies and know-how on affordable terms. We strongly feel that the post-Kyoto agreement should set up a technology transfer board, in order to ensure that the least developed nations have access to affordable, eco-friendly technologies. Bangladesh will not be able to attain sustainable development without appropriate technological support in that regard.

We would not have discussed the food crisis issue here in the Assembly, if we had believed that it was a one-off event. The crisis will revisit us, perhaps with greater intensity and frequency, unless we put in place both short- and long-term measures to prevent its recurrence. Many of us in the developing world were deeply encouraged when the Secretary-General responded to our urgent request for a high-level task force to address the current food crisis. It was also timely and appropriate that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations convened the High-Level Conference on World Food Security in Rome in June 2008. The Conference afforded us the opportunity to deliberate on systemic and non-systemic issues that exacerbated the current food crisis.

Bangladesh, as representative of the least developed countries, also urged the Secretary-General to look into the possibility of creating a global food bank. We suggested that the food bank could allow countries facing a short-term shortfall in production to borrow food grains on preferential terms. Once they overcame the shortfall, those countries could return the quantum to the food bank. We could also explore the possibility of determining special drawing rights for each country, using criteria such as population, level of poverty and annual variation in their level of food production. Such an arrangement would allow us to prevent hoarding and price gouging by speculators in anticipation of, and during, a food crisis, and we believe that a mechanism can be put in place to guard against any moral hazard issues that might arise.

Since the adoption of the Brussels Programme of Action in 2001, LDCs as a group, have made some progress in their macroeconomic performance and on a few social indicators. The progress is, however, insufficient and uneven. More important, their economic growth has made only a little dent in poverty. LDCs continue to face serious structural hurdles in

their development efforts. They remain acutely susceptible to external economic shocks and natural and man-made disasters.

The full and effective implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action has now become an even greater necessity. However, it is unlikely that we will achieve the overarching goals of the Programme of Action and the MDGs, unless international commitment to the LDCs in the areas of aid and trade is fully delivered.

The Brussels Programme of Action will conclude in 2010. The General Assembly is in the process of preparing for the fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, to be held towards the end of the current decade. The upcoming conference will provide an important opportunity for LDCs and their partners to review critically past performance, especially in the areas of failures and weak implementation. That will help us develop a new, action-oriented strategic framework for the next decade to assist the LDCs in their development efforts. I call upon Member States to extend full and effective support for the successful holding of the next United Nations conference on the LDCs.

Bangladesh is in the midst of a profound change that we believe is also relevant to people all around the world, especially to those fighting poverty, corruption and underdevelopment. As with any process of change, it is not without setbacks and will take time to complete, but in the end we remain confident of our success. Our goal is to strengthen democracy in Bangladesh, and my Government has done everything in its power over the course of the past 20 months to work towards that end.

I have spoken about the remarkable achievement with our voters list, which will ensure that the elections this December and every election thereafter can be free and fair; and I have also discussed some of the fundamental institutional reforms that we have undertaken to bolster the foundations of democracy. Many countries around the world are in their own ways going through similar processes, and we hope to share our experiences in order to help them, as we ourselves have benefited from the support of the international community and organizations like the United Nations Development Programme.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Chief Adviser of The Caretaker Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser of The Caretaker Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by The Right Honourable Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

The Right Honourable Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency The Right Honourable Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Dahal "Prachanda" (Nepal): At the outset, allow me to congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election as President of the General Assembly and to assure him of my delegation's full cooperation in discharging his responsibilities. I also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the work of the United Nations (A/63/1) and his positive reference to the situation prevailing in Nepal.

It is, indeed, a historic opportunity for me to address this Assembly as the first Prime Minister of Nepal, the newest republic of the world. As I stand here in front of the global leadership, I think of the long struggle that I and my party waged with single-mindedness for the liberation of the common man from the clutches of the age-old suppression, deprivation, marginalization and outright negligence of the previously existing polity. My fellow countrymen and women, toiling in the mountains and valleys, working day and night in the lowlands and the urban areas and yet unable to ensure even the simple necessities of life for their families, had a hope and expectation that one day they would lead a decent life with equal rights and opportunities and be recognized as respected citizens of the country.

We are at that significant turning point in the political history of Nepal, and I and my party are proud to be the leading force of that positive historical change. Today, I see a great hope in the glinting eyes of the Dalit boy from the far west, the downtrodden woman from the indigenous nationality in the east, the homeless Tharu girl, the landless Madhesi and other peasants from the hills living under thatched roofs. I intend to lead them with conviction and sincerity in a new journey of sustainable peace and equitable progress in a modern Nepal. I have, therefore, the honour and great privilege of bringing with me to the Assembly the greetings and best wishes of the people and the Government of that new Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

Following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in November 2006, after a decade-long armed struggle, we began our peace process and eventually held elections to the Constituent Assembly in April this year. People overwhelmingly voted for my party and made us the single largest political party in the Assembly with great hope and expectations. At its first meeting, the Constituent Assembly declared Nepal a federal democratic republic, formally ending the 240-year-old monarchy and creating a new opportunity to transform the old feudalistic State into an inclusive and federal new Nepal. That was in keeping with the long-standing aspirations of the Nepalese people. They voted in favour of the change and transformation that my own party had fought for over so many years. After the historic political transformation, our agenda now is to bring about an equally historic socio-economic transformation of the country.

Today, I must report with all humility that our Constituent Assembly is the most inclusive representative body, of which all marginalized, oppressed ethnic communities, indigenous nationalities, Dalits, the disadvantaged and people from the backward regions and communities are members, which will herald a new beginning in the country. That may very well be an example of representativeness to the world in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The Government is committed to restoring law and order, providing immediate relief to the people affected by the conflict, fighting against the cancerous growth of corruption and starting an economic recovery package, focusing on pro-poor growth, infrastructure development and public-private partnership. The Government will build an effective partnership with the international community in creating an atmosphere for unleashing a new socio-economic transformation, for which the Nepalese people have so long been waiting.

Nepal's peace process is unique in its characteristics and is based on multiparty democracy, inclusiveness, accommodation, dialogue and the recognition of the people as the ultimate arbiter. It is the outcome of our own creative disposition towards peace, and we feel that it can also serve as a reference model for peace elsewhere.

We appreciate the continued support of the United Nations for the peace process, especially in monitoring the management of arms and personnel through the United Nations Mission in Nepal. The United Nations Mission has undertaken its mandated tasks well. I also take this opportunity to thank our neighbours, friends and donors for their continued support in favour of the peace process and the institutionalization of democracy in Nepal. I am confident they are doing so to unleash Nepal's development potential, in accordance with the wish of the Nepalese people.

As we proceed in the peace process within the country, new problems in the form of the global food crisis, rising oil prices and imminent danger from climate change stare us in the face. Those challenges also undermine our achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There will be no success in achieving the MDGs without ensuring that they are achieved in the least developed countries. Solemn pledges were made in the 2000 Millennium Declaration and at the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey. Many of those commitments are yet to be fulfilled and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals remains elusive to most of the world's poor people.

The United Nations agenda today has to tackle those development challenges and many other issues, such as religious extremism, terrorism, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction; transnational crimes, such as drugs, human trafficking and money-laundering; continuing conflicts within and among States; and gross violations of human rights, genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is more than obvious that many of those global problems require global solutions. Together, we can rise to the occasion and adopt the vision and

strategy that the founders of the United Nations charted in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the Organization. Multilateralism, not unilateralism, is the answer to those problems.

Least developed countries like Nepal are faced with a special predicament in their development efforts. We are trapped in a vicious circle of poverty. For many historical reasons, we have low economic growth, low productivity, underdeveloped industries and traditional agriculture. Because of the low level of social indicators and fewer opportunities, conflict and crisis continue to be prevalent in those countries.

Today, the growing gap between rich and poor within countries as well as between nations is a sure sign of a looming disaster. It is also inhuman and unjust that such a high level of inequality is still so common in this age of human achievements, abundance and progress. Equally important is the fact that islands of prosperity in a sea of poverty are not sustainable and certainly not in the enlightened self-interest of even the developed countries themselves, as they breed resentment, fuel conflict and undermine their own progress in the long run. They also go against the fundamental spirit of the United Nations.

Because of the peculiar nature of the least developed countries and their high level of vulnerability, I strongly urge that the issues of least developed countries be looked at by the United Nations separately and addressed with special and focused programmes. They should be ensured dedicated support and cooperation if we want to make our world the just and inclusive place that the United Nations so proudly espouses.

We are not only least developed, but also landlocked. That is a double disadvantage in our efforts to fulfil our development aspirations. In fact, we feel further marginalized by the overwhelming impact of the downside of globalization and the high cost of trade. We want full implementation of the respective global compacts, the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries and the Almaty Programme of Action for the landlocked developing countries. In particular, I would like to highlight the need on the part of our developed country partners to fulfil their commitments and pledges in allocating a certain percentage of their gross national product to those countries and in making trade concessions, debt relief and other capacity-building measures available in accordance with those compacts. On our part, I would like to undertake that Nepal will fulfil its pledge to own its development programmes in accordance with its national priorities, including those on poverty reduction and pro-poor governance policies.

We need to protect our people from the growing vulnerabilities of climate change. For example, in my own country, Nepal, melting glaciers and shifting weather patterns are threatening life-support systems, undermining the sustainability of agriculture and unleashing extreme climate-induced disasters, such as frequent floods and landslides. The Himalayan range provides life-supporting water downstream for more than 1 billion people. Mount Everest, as the roof of the world, and the Himalayan range need to be protected and utilized properly to contribute to humankind as a whole.

I therefore strongly appeal to the international community to extend all necessary support and cooperation to protect and promote that pristine environment. We need to create a regime of common but differentiated responsibilities in which the developed countries will mitigate the burden of adaptation for the vulnerable countries, such as the least developed and small islands. The world stands to benefit from addressing climate change if we are able to harness the tremendous potentials of Nepal's hydropower, which is a renewable and clean source of energy. To that end, Nepal is ready to invite and encourage investment in its hydropower projects.

I am pleased that the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific is now operational in Kathmandu 20 years after it was established by this Assembly. I thank all Members, countries of the region, the Secretary-General and the officials of the Secretariat for the smooth relocation of the Centre from New York to Kathmandu. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate Nepal's commitment to making the Centre successful through the cooperation of all countries concerned.

Over the years, peacekeeping has evolved as the soul of the United Nations. With that in mind, since 1958 Nepal has regularly placed its peacekeepers at the call of the United Nations. We are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Nepal's continuous participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations. I take this opportunity to reiterate Nepal's commitment to

continuing to provide our troops for the cause of peace worldwide. Today, Nepal is the fifth largest contributor of troops and police personnel to United Nations peacekeeping operations. We are glad that they have earned accolades for their professional competence and performance both at home and abroad. We consider that to be our modest contribution to international peace and security.

The enjoyment of universal human rights is absolutely essential to creating an environment of peace, justice, democracy and development. As a democracy, Nepal is fully committed to protecting and promoting the human rights of its people under all circumstances, with constitutional and legal guarantees and implementation of the international human rights instruments to which Nepal is a party. The Government is committed to ending the environment of impunity. The proposed truth and reconciliation commission will seek to arrive at a necessary balance between peace and justice in order to ensure that justice is served and that the centrality of the peace process is preserved. We will continue to strengthen our National Human Rights Commission so that it can take up its statutory responsibility for the protection and promotion of human rights in the country even more effectively. It goes without saying that the environment for the protection and promotion of human rights in Nepal has significantly improved, especially after the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement in November 2006.

As a least developed country that entered the World Trade Organization (WTO) not too long ago, Nepal is concerned at the lack of tangible progress in negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda. We think that the opportunities in world trade through the multilateral trading framework of WTO should not be delayed any further. The least developed countries deserve genuine duty-free and quota-free market access for all their tradable products from all the major countries, together with more favourable rules of origin and support for enhancing their supply-side capacity. Only then will the Doha Round be a development round in the real sense of the word. Without the meaningful integration of the least developed countries into the global regime, I do not know how we can make the global trading regime sustainable, equitable and inclusive. Similarly, the least developed countries need more aid for trade and trade facilitation measures to enhance their trading capacity.

Today, the United Nations needs to reform and democratize itself in order to take on the numerous challenges in international peace and security effectively, and it should reflect the current realities of the world. We should also give the necessary credibility, legitimacy, competence and effectiveness to the world body in solving global problems.

I take this opportunity to reiterate Nepal's solemn faith and commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. On behalf of the people and the Government of Nepal, I pledge to work with all States Members in a spirit of goodwill, cooperation and mutual solidarity in order to take on the challenges that face the world. Indeed, we have adopted that spirit as one of the main tenets of Nepal's foreign policy.

Nepal is an example of how swords can be turned into ploughshares. That is what the United Nations is dedicated to. Therefore, as I address this Assembly today, I have a special feeling about the objectives and ideals that the United Nations stands for and the correlation between those ideals and the political, economic and social transformation that we would like to achieve in our country. May we all succeed in attaining our common objectives through our collective and sincere efforts as united and inseparable members of a single global family.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minster of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal for the statement he has just made.

The Right Honourable Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Gordon Brown, Prime

Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Brown (United Kingdom): It is humbling to stand before this great Assembly today. Events of recent weeks have proved beyond doubt that we are now in a new global age. Living through the first financial crisis and the first resources crisis of globalization, we are a world not simply in transition, but facing transformation, with change more far-reaching than anything we have seen in our lifetimes. The challenges, the opportunities for us and the risks that we now face come together at the global crossroads of the United Nations, providing the focus for debate and decision here in this General Assembly Hall.

A predecessor of mine said that if one built the present only in the image of the past, one would miss out entirely on the challenges of the future. It is to those challenges of the future that I want to address my remarks today.

In the next two decades, our world economy will double in size. That means double the opportunities and potential for more businesses, more jobs and more prosperity. Extraordinary promise and opportunity await, but there are also wholly new insecurities and pressures — global problems that will require global solutions.

The twin shocks of a global credit crunch and soaring commodity prices lead straight to the front doors of every family in every country, with higher oil, gas and food prices, and higher costs for credit. But because it is a global financial crisis and a global shortage of food and resources, it will not be resolved simply by individual nations acting in isolation, although there is much that they can do themselves. It will be solved in the end by us acting together.

I want to talk about how we can work together to tackle financial instability and the intense pressure now on our finite world resources. The immediate priority is to help people everywhere cope with these difficult times and to do so fairly. That is why, in Britain, we have acted to help those hit hardest, assisting people with the costs of gas and electricity, supporting homeowners and the housing market and helping people acquire the skills to do the new jobs of the twenty-first century.

But if we have learned anything in the past few years about the world in which we are now living, it is that the world we share is more interconnected than ever before and that the solutions have to be similarly coordinated.

First, we must do all that it takes to stabilize the still turbulent financial markets and, in the months ahead, we must work together to rebuild the world financial system around clear principles. In the short term, each country is taking action to deal with the fallout of the credit crunch, and the United States of America deserves support from the rest of the world as it seeks to agree on in detail what all parties agree on in principle.

In Britain, we have taken decisive action to promote stability in our banking system, protecting depositors and introducing a temporary ban on short-selling. We have already injected billions into the market, making in excess of £100 billion available, and announced only last week that our special liquidity scheme will be extended until the end of January next year.

Confidence in the future is also needed to build confidence today, and that confidence will be built by showing that what are global problems can be addressed by globally coordinated solutions. I believe there are five key principles behind that all nations should unite around as we examine the future of our financial system.

The first principle is that of transparency. People must know what they are buying and selling, and they must know what they are dealing with and not fear what might be hidden on each other's books. We must look at the rapid introduction of improved internationally acceptable accounting standards and disclosure.

Secondly, there must be sound banking practice and more effective regulation that looks not just at solvency but at liquidity, at managing and pricing risks for bad times and for good times, together.

Thirdly, there must be responsibility. No member of senior management should be able to say he or she did not understand the risks they were running and walk away from his or her obligations.

Fourthly, there must be integrity. Most people agree that companies should align reward with stability and long-term gain because what matters is hard work,

effort and enterprise. We should align the advice of credit-rating agencies with the interests of the investors.

Fifthly, just as banks are global and the flows of capital are global, so oversight can no longer just be national but must also include global supervision. That is why we want to work to support immediately the establishment of international colleges for each of the largest global financial institutions — 30 of them by the end of the year.

The international institutions built in the wake of the Second World War have not kept pace with the changing global economy. We need national regulators to be cooperative, rules and principles to be consistent, and international movements of capital to be transparent.

The current era has been one of global prosperity. It has also been an era of global turbulence, and while there has been irresponsibility, we must now say clearly that the age of irresponsibility must be ended. We must now build that new global financial order, founding it on transparency, not opacity; rewarding success, not excess; and responsibility, not impunity. That order must be global, not national.

Global action cannot be limited to financial stability. We must also address another problem of globalization — the global scramble for resources. We need global action to deal with high commodity prices and a rising global population demanding more energy. Only by taking tough decisions on energy security and climate change and by bringing together a new global partnership of oil producers and oil consumers can we bring stability to global energy markets and secure sustainable energy supplies for the long term.

We are committed to tackling the global challenge of climate change. Oil will of course continue to meet a large part of our global energy needs for some decades to come, but over the past year we have seen the price of oil rise to as high as $146 per barrel before falling again to $90 in the past month — a fall of nearly 40 per cent. Such high and volatile prices have a harmful impact on the global economy, and all countries surely have a shared interest in avoiding such dramatic swings in the price of scarce resources.

We must now therefore consider whether the current international architecture can bring the more transparent and stable energy markets this global economy clearly needs. We must bring producers and consumers together, build common understanding and address the issues through meaningful and sustained dialogue. At the end of this year, I will be hosting a global energy summit in London, building on the momentum generated in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to agree on key areas for further action. It is only by acting together that we can make the most of the world's scarce resources and harness the power of our greater interdependence for our common good.

Some say that in a time of difficulty we should look inwards and cut aid; that we have an excuse for walking by on the other side; and that, by our inaction, we tolerate famine — but in today's world, there is no other side.

Africa is not part of the problem, but an indisputable part of the solution. It is only by helping Africa to become a net exporter of food rather than a net importer that we can hope to achieve a long-term end to soaring food prices. Only by restarting and seeing the trade talks through can we help our economies benefit from the annual boost of $150 billion that would be achieved by removing the protectionist trade barriers and trade-distorting subsidies that currently cost developing countries the most — $15 billion a year in their agricultural incomes alone.

As Governments and as nations, we must respond with courage and vision to the new insecurities that face people, because while the global changes happening all around us are complex, the instincts they summon up in people are not. We must resist those instincts that are protectionist. Now is not the time to pull up the drawbridge, to seek solace in isolation or to revert to an outdated and futile protectionism. It is only by maintaining our open, flexible and dynamic economies that we can best secure people's jobs, homes and standards of living in a global age.

Our global institutions have always had a sweeping ambition, set up not against a single enemy but against poverty, conflict, injustice and intolerance, and set up in the belief that, for peace to last, prosperity must be shared. Now we must build on the idealism of the era that created those institutions and change and evolve those institutions to meet the challenges of the global age. This United Nations is where the world turns to confront some of its greatest

challenges. It is where international law is made, where the most acute political problems are addressed, and where the hopes of the world for a better future ultimately rest.

For the past 40 years, it has been this United Nations that has been the key forum where the international community has sought peace in the Middle East, and it is the United Nations that must help the next Government of Israel build on the foundations laid by Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to agree to a two-State solution that guarantees the security of Israel and gives the Palestinians a viable State.

In Cyprus, where the United Nations has been present for 30 years and more, we have a real chance of a settlement, thanks to new leadership, which has our support.

In Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force is training Afghans to take back their country after two generations of almost constant conflict. When the Afghan Government can deny its land to Al-Qaida and its associates, the international community will have done its job, but the task is hard and long. Progress is encouraging, but must be continued and stepped up.

In the Sudan, United Nations peacekeepers help keep the fragile North-South peace agreement in place, but Darfur remains for all of us a disaster. It is the responsibility of the Government of the Sudan to create the conditions in Darfur that will allow the conflict to end and a new deal for the people of Darfur to be put in place. Justice has to be part of any sustainable peace.

Difficulty has never daunted the United Nations. Where we are rebuffed, we are resolute, so we must also send a powerful signal of our support for democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe. We must stand firm against oppression in Burma. We must, as we did yesterday, reaffirm the practical measures that underpin our determination to defeat poverty. Now would be the worst time to turn our back on the Millennium Development Goals.

We have reached a unique point in the world's history. For the first time in human history, we have the opportunity to come together around a global covenant, to reframe the international architecture to make it fit for the challenges facing us in the twenty-first century, and to build the first truly global society and global citizenship. Our history is not our destiny, it is what we choose to make it.

Let us resolve today to end any irresponsibility, to protect the global public interest by cleaning up the world's financial system and to reaffirm our commitment to meeting our global responsibilities on trade, poverty, energy and climate change, and let us act upon that as people, as Governments, as nations united. Let history record that ours was a truly global response to the first truly global crisis.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by The Honourable Orette Bruce Golding, Prime Minister of Jamaica

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Jamaica.

The Honourable Orette Bruce Golding, Prime Minister of Jamaica, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency The Honourable Orette Bruce Golding, Prime Minister of Jamaica, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Golding (Jamaica): It is perhaps fortuitous that my own Deputy Prime Minister happens to be presiding over the Assembly at the time when I address the Assembly for the very first time. But it is not true, as someone suggested to me just before I came to the rostrum, that we have come to the sixty-third session of the General Assembly believing that we are still at the Olympics in Beijing. Neither is it true that my name is Usain Bolt. My name is Bruce Golding.

I offer Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann my congratulations on his presidency and I ask you, Mr. Vice-President, to convey those congratulations to him. He has assumed that office at a time when the world faces challenges of crisis proportions. Much will be demanded of his leadership, and I want you, Sir, to assure him of Jamaica's full support and cooperation in all of his endeavours.

We have convened amid worrying global developments. The hopes of the new millennium are in danger of fading as the ideals of international harmony and shared global prosperity remain elusive. Globalization, despite its promise of expanded production and trade, has been uneven in the spread of its benefits and, for many countries, marginal in its impact. Indeed, the gap between rich and poor has widened within and among countries.

The global economy now appears to be headed for a severe downturn. Developments in the global financial system, the painful increase in oil and commodity prices and the escalating food crisis threaten to plunge vast sections of the world's population deeper into poverty. Fiscal challenges and the crippling burden of debt render many countries incapable of responding to the crisis. Countries like Jamaica are called upon to respond within our limited capacity to protect the most vulnerable.

In the long term, however, our hopes for survival will require huge investments, improved productivity, better access to the world's markets and human capacity-building. Developing countries cannot be left to find their own solutions. The situation requires a collaborative, coordinated and global response. That is not mere altruism. It is an indisputable truth that, if developed countries assist developing countries to improve their economies, their productive capacity and the purchasing power of their people, they will expand the markets for their own goods and services. It is the interdependency that we share and that is manifested in so many other areas, from climate change to global epidemics, organized crime and human trafficking.

Solving the problem of developing countries requires more than mere liberalization of trade, more than mere privatization of the economy and more than the mere free flow of capital. It requires a sincere and sustained effort that focuses on the limitations that bedevil developing countries. Global development, not just global markets, must be at the centre of our priorities.

Poverty and wealth should not have to coexist. Poverty can be eradicated. The tools of development exist and are capable of transforming the world, empowering the poor and enabling them to rise from their poverty. We must therefore commit ourselves to creating a world in which not everyone may be rich, but no one has to be poor.

In 2001, we committed ourselves to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. We are now at the halfway mark and we are behind schedule. It is time to take stock to see where we are, who is falling behind, and what must be done to make up lost ground.

A critical success factor must be the partnership between developed and developing countries as defined in the 2002 Monterrey Consensus on financing for development, integrating aid, debt relief, market access, good governance and foreign direct investment. Those initiatives were carefully calibrated. Proceeding with some elements without the others will not achieve the goals we have set. Indeed, it might make it worse.

We must all pull up our socks if we are to reverse the slippage we have suffered. Developing countries must ensure that their priorities are properly structured. Developed countries must live up to their commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of their gross national income to official development assistance. That is a modest amount, yet only five countries have so far done so.

The focus of development cooperation cannot, I submit, be too narrowly defined. The varied economic and social profiles of developing countries require a more flexible response that recognizes investment in human capital, infrastructure and the transfer of technology as critical elements in reducing poverty in a sustained way.

That is particularly important to developing countries that are classified, based on per capita income, as middle-income countries. That classification deprives them of access to concessionary financing and creative measures to reduce the crippling debt burden that afflicts so many of them. If we are to reduce poverty, the peculiar circumstances of those countries cannot be ignored since that is where more than one third of the world's poor are to be found.

We call on the international community to devise strategic programmes to address the peculiar needs of middle-income countries with deep pockets of poverty. Because of those factors and because of our exposure to frequent natural disasters, which in the matter of a few hours can reverse gains that took years to accomplish, Jamaica and its Caribbean Community (CARICOM) partners are proposing the international recognition of CARICOM States as a special category of small vulnerable and highly indebted middle-income countries.

The international financial system, designed more than 60 years ago in the context of those times, has undergone very little change in its governance, structure and practices. However, the world has changed and that requires a re-engineering of the global financial system. Jamaica supports the call for reform of the existing financial infrastructure to reflect the new global realities and make it more proactive and responsive to the needs of the entire world community. I want to suggest, however, that it must involve more than merely expanding the membership of an exclusive club. It must be development-driven, recognizing that poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity elsewhere. It must include mechanisms to detect signs of global crises and must be able to institute preventive measures.

The crisis currently rocking the world's financial markets reflects the inadequacy of the regulatory structures that are essential to the effective functioning of any market. But it is more than that. It represents the failure on the part of the international financial system to facilitate the flow of resources into areas where they can produce real wealth, not paper wealth. The world is not short of capital. What it lacks are the mechanisms to ensure the efficient utilization of that capital.

I want to suggest that another urgent task is the creation of a viable and equitable international trading system. Jamaica is deeply disappointed that the Doha Development Round has failed to deliver on the promise of an open, fair and predictable multilateral trading system. We urge all parties to resolve the outstanding differences, particularly on the removal of trade-distorting agricultural subsidies, and to address the need for special safeguard mechanisms for economically challenged countries.

The need for more concerted action on global warming is impatient of debate. Developing countries are the most vulnerable, but they are also the least capable of mitigation measures. Countries that are the major pollutants must bear the major share of the responsibility for corrective action. They must make binding commitments to fulfil that responsibility. The purchase of carbon credits, especially from developing countries, must not exculpate them from that responsibility.

Jamaica calls for a fair, equitable and balanced long-term scheme to bind emission caps within a new international framework beyond 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol expires.

The impact of climate change on agricultural output, and the frequency and intensity of natural disasters to which countries like Jamaica are particularly vulnerable, point to the need for a global environment management structure that establishes clear standards and enforces compliance.

Jamaica is concerned that political instability in many parts of the world, often fuelled by extremism and intolerance, continues to threaten regional and international peace and security. They are neither limited in scope nor confined to national borders. Resolving those conflicts requires effective diplomacy and global cooperation, and the United Nations must continue to use its good offices to secure just and peaceful settlements.

Our intense focus on combating terrorism and transnational organized crime, and eliminating nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction must not, however, marginalize the need for decisive action to curb the illicit trade in small arms, which facilitate internal violence in many of our countries and result in high levels of homicide. Jamaica supports the establishment of an arms trade treaty to impose strict controls on the illegal trade in small arms and ammunition.

The persistent humanitarian crisis in Darfur continues to be a matter of serious concern to all of us. We are disappointed that the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur is not yet fully operational. We urge all parties to desist from actions that could deepen the crisis, jeopardize the safety of the civilian population and of United Nations personnel and prevent access to humanitarian relief.

Jamaica remains irrevocably committed to finding a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict — a solution that must ensure the security of Israel and the establishment of a viable Palestinian State.

The United Nations must continue to play a pivotal role through its peacekeeping missions in the creation of sustainable peace in post-conflict situations. Jamaica will use its membership in the Peacebuilding Commission to underscore the importance of sustained, long-term economic development in rebuilding and

transforming countries that have been wracked by conflict.

The devastation wrought in Haiti by recent hurricanes has aggravated the already harsh conditions under which the Haitian people are forced to live. Much more needs to be done not only in providing emergency relief, but also in addressing the long-term social, economic and development needs of that country, as a sustainable solution to the fragile humanitarian situation that exists there. Haiti needs and deserves the support of the entire international community.

We are gathered here this week as Members of that union we call the United Nations. What is the state of that union? We must not ignore the cynicism that exists in some quarters about the continued value of the United Nations. Those cynics have not bothered to contemplate what the world would be like if the United Nations did not exist. But we have contributed to that cynicism, so often bending the facts to suit our own design, breaking the rules to secure a particular advantage and making commitments without the will to honour them.

Reform of the structure and procedures of the United Nations is an imperative whose time has long come. Let us not bury it in procrastination and incessant squabbling. It is time for constructive, consensus-building dialogue. The need for changes in the structure and scope of the Security Council has been under discussion for almost 15 years, bogged down in polarized, adversarial positions.

We have a compelling duty to put in place systems that can secure peace and prosperity for the future. We therefore welcome the unanimous adoption of decision 62/557, contained in paragraph 23 of document A/62/47, which, we hope, will provide resolve for the early commencement of intergovernmental negotiations within a specified time frame and in the context of an informal plenary meeting of the General Assembly.

The sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights serves to remind us of the central role of the United Nations in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Those are essential components of the environment required for sustained development. It was consistent with that principle that we launched the initiative to erect a monument to honour the victims of slavery. I thank the Secretary-General and the members of the committee for their support and assistance. I also thank Member States that have made or pledged contributions. We invite other States to do likewise.

Six decades ago, the founding fathers of the United Nations agreed that the Organization should be a mechanism for harmonizing the actions of nations in the achievement of our common goals: peace and prosperity throughout the world, respect and tolerance among the powerful and support for the weak and vulnerable. That remains our mandate, our unfinished business. Fulfilling that mandate and advancing that mission will require a more proactive United Nations, one that is more responsive to the needs of Member States and gives equal attention to issues of peace, security and development. The hopes of people everywhere in the world depend on us, the leadership that we provide and the will that we exert for the times in which we live. We must not fail them.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Jamaica for the statement he has just made.

The Honourable Orette Bruce Golding, Prime Minister of Jamaica, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President took the Chair.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Thinley (Bhutan): As the youngest democracy, having become one in April of this year, my country is honoured, and I am honoured, to have this opportunity to present ourselves before this great world body. In a country that has enjoyed continuous

justice, stability and progress, democracy came not by the traditional way of struggle and violence, nor by the will of the people. Bhutan became a democracy by the persuasion and personal efforts of a King who worked consistently over 30 years to establish the prerequisites of a democratic culture and institutional arrangemer .s. Having accomplished that noble task, and having set the polity on the final and irreversible path of democracy, our King abdicated the throne as a final mark of his confidence in democracy. He now lives in quiet retirement at the grand old age of 53.

The King has shown that, if leaders themselves are committed to democracy, the transition can be smooth and peaceful. Likewise, if leaders elected to govern believe in it, democracy provides the best means to serve the people. That is the conviction with which my Government will fulfil the powerful mandate that the people have given to us.

As a representative of a country that is deeply committed to multilateralism and that believes firmly in the indispensability of the United Nations system, I seek the indulgence of the Assembly as I offer Bhutan's perspective from the high Himalayas of our troubled world today.

We are confronted with a host of serious challenges that are testing the relevance of the United Nations and the resolve of its Member States to work together. Natural disasters, food, fuel and financial crises, deepening poverty, failing States, dwindling water resources, diseases, human trafficking and even maritime lawlessness afflict our society. And then there is terrorism and extremism of the most barbaric and cowardly kind, using the weak and the deranged to kill and maim the innocent.

All those challenges threaten to undermine what we have achieved collectively and as individual States. They directly thwart our slow progress in the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which I believe are among the most laudable consensual agreements achieved by this Assembly to bring about a more just and equitable world, indeed, a more civilized world.

Bhutan does not look at those developments as separate, disconnected events. Rather, we see them as directly interconnected symptoms of a larger and deeper malaise that threatens our collective well-being and survival. Responding to each of the challenges separately will most probably be useful in the short term, but piecemeal efforts will not lead to permanent solutions. We need to treat the disease beyond the symptoms. And the disease, we believe, has to do with our way of life, which is simply not rational and sustainable.

One does not need to be an economist to understand that the oil crisis, soaring price of metals and diminishing water reserves have to do with the fact that for too long we have been exploiting and wasting our scarce natural resources. At the very least, these developments are market reactions and attempts to reflect the true value of these resources.

As for the financial crisis, it is becoming quite clear that its main cause lies in our culture of living beyond our means, of private profiteering, of socializing risks. Unfortunately, the possible solution seems to lie in transferring our debt to future generations, who are not here to argue against it.

It is not difficult to see how all these crises are the result of a way of life that is dictated by the powerful ethics of consumerism in a world of finite resources. Our life is all about fear of not having enough, about wanting more and doing better than our dear neighbour and friend. We spend and consume far beyond our means and those of generations unborn.

As we go on expanding our economies by extracting natural resources, raising productivity, increasing consumption and discharging immeasurable volumes of polluting waste, the climate is changing. Striking unpredictably, unseasonably and with greater fury and frequency, natural disasters such as drought, cyclones, hurricanes, floods and landslides are destroying life, property and crops. Weather patterns have changed and continue to change, with far more profound implications for our civilization than we can fathom. We even wonder whether earthquakes and tsunamis may have something to do with climate change.

Yesterday, we huddled together to find solutions to the food crisis and the danger of growing hunger in a world where already too many are starving. Diseases abound and new epidemics threaten humanity, other life forms and crops even as medicine and technology combine to conspire against mortality. Are these not signals from a planet grossly abused? Could these not be pleas to mend our ways and to search for a more sustainable way of life?

Deepening poverty, not unlike the food crisis, is also a sign of the disintegration of communities. As communities die, so does the spirit of sharing, borrowing and giving amid good neighbourliness in times of need, as opposed to competing and making gains at the cost of community, neighbour and even one's own family. It is about the failure of human relationships, including between and among States. This, I believe, lies at the root of the poverty, hunger, instability and insecurity that plague much of the world today.

These multiple crises bring into sharp focus the shameful inequities of our society, which fails to share and to distribute the enormous wealth it has created to satisfy man's insatiable greed. People suffer from hunger, thirst and exposure to the elements and die without treatment not because we do not have enough food, water, clothes or medicine, but because we do not have the will to share and the care to distribute.

Only yesterday, I was wondering how many tons of food and medicine must be taken off the shelves of Manhattan stores and put into the incinerator at the end of each day as they become stale or reach their date of expiry. On the other hand, even to this day, few developed countries have fulfilled their pledge to share less than 1 per cent of their gross national product (GNP) with developing countries. Likewise, the pharmaceutical companies have convincing arguments to offer against lowering the cost of medicines.

We need to wake up from our narcissistic slumber and self-indulgence and realize that economic well-being is not human well-being. We must break away from the shackles of the powerful forces of the market. For that matter, could the unravelling of the market-based economy, as evident in the financial crisis, be a glimpse of the truth that mindless and irresponsible economic growth and expansion cannot go on? It is neither sustainable nor fair to future generations. Above all, we could be condemning our own selves to an old age of burdensome debt and regret.

That brings us to the question of whether our fundamentals are sound. Is the GDP-led growth that has served as our measure of progress good enough for the future? What are the foundations of our civilizations and the values that guide us? As we get richer and live by the terms that we have set for ourselves, are we truly becoming more civilized, or are we trapped in a downward spiral of de-civilization?

I ask again: does economic growth translate as human development? Are we mutating to become senseless robots programmed to be materially productive, to earn more, to want more, to consume more and more of what we do not need and will ultimately destroy us?

As human beings, should we not search for and be driven by higher values? Do we not have needs beyond material ones, beyond that of the body alone? Can we conceptualize a holistic alternative paradigm for meaningful and sustainable development that places the well-being of the individual and community at the centre and gives cause for true happiness, as opposed to fleeting pleasures?

I am pleased to submit that many academic institutions and researchers across the world are engaged in such a search and are making progress. The latest to join is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which has hosted a series of regional and world conferences to develop indicators to measure true human progress.

My country, Bhutan, is one such entity. While being actively involved as a partner in the global efforts in this regard, we have pursued a unique development path, guided by our former King's philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), since the early 1970s. GNH is based on the belief that happiness is the single most important goal and purpose in life for every individual and that the end of development must be the promotion and enhancement of happiness. It must, therefore, we believe, be the responsibility of the State to create an enabling environment within which its citizens can pursue happiness.

The concept emphasizes a balanced life, matching the material needs of the body with the spiritual, psychological and emotional needs of the mind. To that end, the Royal Government structured its development programmes around four broad themes, or pillars, that constitute a paradigm for holistic and sustainable development. These are: sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, not growth; environmental conservation; the promotion of culture; and good governance. Since the 1970s we have never wavered from that path, thanks greatly to the generosity and support of our development partners. The former King never faltered, sacrificing his own

reign to leave the legacy of a unique democracy and a country that is peaceful, progressive and happy.

I urge the members of the Assembly to reflect on those and other considerations so that such crises as have now stricken us may never reappear, so that we can return each year to this Assembly and find reasons to smile and to be happy. To that end, Mr. President, please be assured of Bhutan's fullest support for and cooperation with you and the Secretary-General.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Sergei Stanishev, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Mr. Sergei Stanishev, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Sergei Stanishev, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Stanishev (Bulgaria): It is a privilege and an honour to address this distinguished audience on behalf of Bulgaria, particularly as my country is celebrating the centennial anniversary of the proclamation of its independence. Throughout those 100 years, Bulgaria asserted and safeguarded its independence, often through active participation in international organizations, including the United Nations. Having recently become a member of the European Union (EU), my country is now even more committed to the universal and regulatory role of the United Nations in today's globalized world. We align ourselves with the statement made by President Sarkozy of the French Republic on behalf of the EU (*5th meeting*).

Permit me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. We wish you every success in the months ahead and pledge our full support for your endeavours. Our deep gratitude goes to His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim for his able guidance of the Assembly at its previous session.

Given the growing urgency of food security, the topic that we are discussing today is of crucial importance. We fully support the United Nations-led efforts, reflected in the Rome Declaration, to ensure a timely response to a problem that may have grave consequences for the livelihoods of millions of people.

Food security is a cross-cutting issue that should be considered against the background of other interrelated global challenges, such as climate change and energy security. These also demand an immediate response based on the common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities of various countries. The United Nations should continue to provide a unique forum for the elaboration of the effective multilateral approach needed.

Next spring, Bulgaria intends to host a summit entitled "Gas for Europe: New Transregional Partnerships and Projects". It is important to bring together heads of State and Government from all interested countries in South-Eastern Europe, the Black Sea/Caspian Sea region, Central Asia, the EU and the United States in order to encourage political dialogue at the highest level and to enhance transregional cooperation with a view to achieving a balance among energy and other strategic interests.

Effective multilateralism requires an intensive partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations. On the basis of the European Union-United Nations Joint Declaration on Cooperation in Crisis Management, the EU and the United Nations have engaged in partnerships that have already delivered results in many areas related to peacemaking and peacebuilding. A good and pragmatic relationship between the United Nations and NATO in the Western Balkans, Afghanistan and Africa is also of crucial importance.

Various forms of regional, subregional and transborder cooperation may serve as building blocks for a comprehensive collective security system. Peace and stability are well rooted when local communities and immediate neighbours live in harmony. That philosophy guided the recent Bulgarian chairmanship of the South-East European Cooperation Process. Regional cooperation in South-East Europe has recently gained momentum. South-East Europe is in

the process of changing from an area recovering from war to a thriving and dynamic region. Over the past 12 months, a whole new architecture of interaction has come into being, connecting the countries of the region to the rest of Europe and the international community. In line with the concept of regional ownership, the pivotal role has now been assumed by the new Regional Cooperation Council.

Democracy, security and cooperation still have a way to go in the Black Sea region. More coherent efforts are needed for an ultimate settlement of the protracted conflicts there. Frozen conflicts should not be neglected, because they tend to reignite tension time and again. The recent armed hostilities in South Ossetia and in other parts of Georgia have provided ample evidence to that effect. Bulgaria gave its full support to the peacemaking mission of the French EU presidency and remains actively involved in the preparation of the EU Monitoring Mission. We are convinced that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia should be upheld and that the military contingents should be withdrawn to their positions prior to the conflict in order to allow effective monitoring by the EU and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) of the implementation of the six-point plan.

Bulgaria contributes fully to the Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which should address the needs and priorities of all partners in the region. We see opportunities for launching projects in important sectors such as transport, trade, energy, the environment and border security. The EU's Black Sea Synergy initiative is a pragmatic way to intertwine various regional initiatives, thus multiplying their effect.

As prevention and development are inextricably linked, the Bulgarian Government and the country office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Bulgaria are currently exploring the potential for a Bulgaria/UNDP regional hub for the Western Balkans and the Black Sea area to share accumulated know-how, training and research.

We condemn terrorism unequivocally and reject terrorist ideology in all its forms and manifestations. The first review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy held recently proved that the United Nations should continue to play a central role in mobilizing the international community to counter terrorism and all related phenomena, such as radicalization and extremism.

In countering terrorism, it is essential to conduct that struggle within the requirements of international law and to overcome prejudices and stereotype perceptions in a world of great diversity. Bulgaria's long history of tolerance has been based on the common understanding that cultural diversity is a great asset in our society. It is in that spirit that Bulgaria actively participates in the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and supports other like-minded initiatives.

This year, we mark the sixtieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping operations. As we pay tribute to the six decades of promoting peace and protecting the vulnerable, we should also realize that there is still much to be done. The United Nations is facing a serious challenge due to the complex and multidimensional character of a growing number of peace operations and missions.

Bulgaria continues to make its contribution to the international peacekeeping efforts in the western Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa. Our task today is not only to keep the peace; we must also make certain that peace is irreversible and sustainable. The Peacebuilding Commission, an early achievement of the reform process, has now become functional and has achieved some practical results in Burundi and Sierra Leone.

Global celebrations of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this year have reaffirmed the critical importance of universal adherence to international human rights standards, the realization of which should make the world better for us all, free of poverty, intolerance and discrimination. Despite the progress achieved, we should never relent in our efforts. The Human Rights Council, with its institution-building process successfully accomplished, should engage in constructive, all-inclusive work aimed at promoting and guaranteeing all human rights for all.

Stable peace and security can be achieved only through development. Therefore, there is an urgent need to accelerate the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. We are convinced that the responsibility for the timely achievement of

those Goals lies with both developed and developing countries.

Solidarity with those in need, and in particular with the developing countries, is an important and irrevocable principle of Bulgarian foreign policy. We are taking our first steps in building a new donor capacity and shall strive to achieve the targeted levels of official development assistance as part of the European Union development cooperation policy.

In order to perform its role in the world efficiently, the United Nations must follow persistently the course of reforms initiated at the 2005 World Summit. We welcome the progress achieved during the sixty-second session of the General Assembly towards improving the working modalities of the main United Nations bodies. Bulgaria expects that the remaining tasks on the United Nations reform agenda will be pursued vigorously and without delay during the current session.

In that regard, we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General and his determination expressed in his opening statement. It is in our common interest to ensure that this sixty-third session of the General Assembly achieve tangible results. That is what the peoples of our countries, the people of the world, are expecting of us.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Sergei Stanishev, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by The Honourable Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa.

The Honourable Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Malielegaoi (Samoa): The United Nations embodies multilateralism. It is living testimony of the intergovernmental process at work. Samoa's membership of the United Nations is grounded on the promise of the hope, equality and justice the United Nations offers the Member States, irrespective of their economic, political or military strengths. Looking back, our Organization has not lived up to the lofty goals enshrined in its Charter. Its credibility has been tarnished and undermined, and its performance questioned at times.

Yet, those perceived failings of our Organization are of our own making when we allow the vested interests of a few to take precedence over the urgent and deserving needs of the majority; when we accept flawed perceptions that certain issues, States and regions are more important than others, distorting the world's focus and the allocation of resources; when we turn a blind eye and let the numerical superiority of groups or the importance of some stakeholders frustrate informed discussions of critical issues to score points and achieve symbolic wins that help no one in the long run; and when the long list of broken promises and unfulfilled undertakings couched in eloquent yet meaningless rhetoric creates frustration and mistrust among Member States.

The end result is that if no one takes responsibility, the future of the United Nations will be in doubt and the cost to the world incalculable. We have no one but ourselves to blame for any deficit in the credibility of our Organization. What we urgently need is a collective sense of trust and commitment to its Charter. Only then will the United Nations remain relevant and regain the confidence of our Members.

There is too much at stake for the world to just sit idly by. Strong global leadership is at a premium. Governments must yield not to vested interests and expediency, but because it is the ethical and the just thing to do.

That was my message from this rostrum last year, and I am happy to restate it again today. No Member State is too powerful or too small not to be part of the solution of making the United Nations an agent of change and a beacon of hope during these challenging times. And no contribution is too trivial or unimportant not to matter. For States in leadership positions, the

ideal is to lead with humility, fairness and a kind heart. The world expects nothing less. Leadership and responsibility are, after all, one and the same.

Clearly, Member States can only do so much. We need a committed Secretariat that is aware of and sensitive to the needs of the people it serves. That is a non-negotiable prerequisite. Samoa supports the Secretary-General's vision of creating a professional career service that is flexible and mobile enough to allow for quick and positive responses to the diverse demands of Member States. The need for the United Nations to deliver as one entity cannot be overemphasized. It adds value and quality to the process, eliminates waste, minimizes overlaps and ensures that the scarce resources entrusted to its care are used optimally to supplement Members States' hard-earned efforts.

Right now our world is facing a difficult and troubled time. As members of the global community, our futures are inextricably linked. For Samoa, the small size of our country, its isolation from the major markets and permanent vulnerability to climate change are factors beyond our control. Yet even as a least developed small island nation that has made little or no contribution to the causes of today's crises, Samoa is not shielded from their immediate negative impact and long-term consequences.

Global crises, as we know from bitter experience with global warming, energy and food prices, and now with the mayhem in financial markets that threatens to engulf the world, affect all our nations irrespective of whether we contributed to those crises or not.

This is why, in spite of shortcomings in the Organization, the United Nations remains the only viable institution that draws all the nations of our world together. However, the need to revitalize the General Assembly and to reform the Security Council has been obvious for many years. In the case of the Security Council, as long as its current composition and rules ignore today's realities, it will continue to struggle to effectively carry out its intended tasks, as we have seen it do over many years.

Samoa remains firm in its position that the permanent and non-permanent membership categories of the Security Council should be expanded. Member States with legitimate credentials should be encouraged to stake their claims. Importantly, the intergovernmental process should commence in earnest during the current session to bring finality to an issue that has taxed Members States' patience and endurance for over a decade and a half.

At the very minimum, the unanimous support of the current permanent members of the Security Council is a must. We hope, therefore, that candidate States and permanent members will reach out to each other in good faith and set aside the barriers that continue to frustrate the reforms to the Security Council that we all know must be made.

One observation that has been made over many years is that there seems to be indifference, whether intended or not, on the part of some of the leader nations of our Organization towards small and economically weak States, which, while they observe good governance and practice sound economic management, are nevertheless faced with the constant struggle to sustain and maintain the hard-won gains on those fronts.

Paradoxically, the only time those struggling States get noticed is when they are tottering on the brink or in the process of becoming failed States. By then, the cost in salvage action and remedial programmes is enormous. Therefore, the willingness of leader nations to listen and to try and understand early on the problems of States struggling to sustain good governance and economic management would go a long way towards creating effective partnerships, deploying scarce resources efficiently, and engendering goodwill and trust in the process.

Troubled spots around the world are on the rise, including in our own Pacific region. Some are occasioned by outside forces and influences, and others through domestically induced factors. Notwithstanding our differences, we all aspire to the same values in life. Hence, we must heed the lessons of history and provide appropriate encouragement and interventions to help States restore good governance and abide by the principles of democracy.

Yesterday's high-level meeting on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was a timely reminder, not of what we have achieved by the midway point, but what decisive actions must be taken urgently if the time-bound targets set at the dawn of the new millennium are to be met. Samoa participated in the recent Accra meeting on aid effectiveness, which further refined the pathways to the MDGs review just concluded and the International Conference on

Financing for Development in Doha in November 2008.

Our strategic plan for 2008 to 2012 is a comprehensive development framework linked to the budget process for the implementation of the MDGs, with strategic targeting of those goals on which we have seen minimal progress through priority resource allocation.

We are grateful to the Governments of the People's Republic of China and the United Kingdom for their support through debt relief. Similarly, we want to acknowledge the innovative partnerships in which we are engaged with our development partners, both old and new, giving us full ownership of the process in our quest to achieve as many of the MDGs as we possibly can.

In September 2007, during the 2007 South Pacific Games in Samoa, my Government worked closely with the United Nations system and others to promote the achievement of the MDGs. One innovative way of using sports as a vehicle to effect change in behaviour and to relay development messages was the installation of a solar-powered "MDG scoreboard" in front of a Government building to monitor national progress towards the MDGs.

Climate change continues to play a pivotal role in the decisions of the leaders in our region. Our Pacific Islands Forum meeting in August 2008 adopted the Niue Declaration on Climate Change. Our Forum communiqué, issued at the same summit, highlighted the vulnerability of Pacific small island developing States to the impacts of climate change. The European Union and the Pacific Islands Forum Troika agreed last week to work together to highlight the ongoing vulnerability of Pacific islands to the impacts of sea-level rise. Our representatives to the United Nations are working with like-minded countries to bring to the fore the security implications of climate change.

In total, those efforts and partnerships should convince those in denial that climate change is real. Its effects have already been felt by some of our Pacific island States, and for some low-lying islands climate change is an existential issue and their long-term survivability is at stake.

Only through selfless and concerted efforts by all countries, led by the major greenhouse gas emitters, can we have a fighting chance of lessening the destructive impact of climate change and enhancing the chances of a credible post-Kyoto agreement beyond 2012. To reach that goal, the Bali Road Map — with its four pillars of adaptation, mitigation, finance and technology — should be supported both in word and in deed.

The unpredictable weather patterns of recent times, affecting all regions of the world, are a sober reminder of our limitations as human beings against the force of natural elements no matter how good and technologically sound our preparations are. We need a global response if we are to succeed. Samoa was pleased, therefore, to see Australia take its place as a State party to the Kyoto Protocol at the Bali meeting. We remain optimistic that, either through a change of heart or through new circumstances, other countries will join the Kyoto Protocol to strengthen the implementation regimes of the Convention.

I mentioned last year the offer of the United Nations system to establish an inter-agency climate change centre in our country for coordinated support to Pacific island countries and regional organizations for climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction. Given the clear importance to the Pacific region of the project, Samoa has allocated land — 16 acres in all — on which to locate the centre and awaits the provision of the necessary resources by the United Nations so that the facility, which is already public knowledge in the region, can be constructed.

Samoa continues to support United Nations peacekeeping efforts worldwide. Small as we are, Samoan police continue to serve side by side with officers from other countries in Liberia, the Sudan and Timor-Leste as part of our ongoing commitment. Within the Pacific region, our solidarity in confronting the challenges facing our neighbours ensures a guaranteed Samoan police presence in the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands under the umbrella of the Pacific Islands Forum.

A durable peace settlement in the Middle East continues to elude us, but that does not constitute grounds to be pessimistic. We should support every effort to create conditions conducive to the creation of an independent Palestinian State alongside a secure and safe State of Israel.

Finally, those bent on creating fear and panic throughout the world will stop at nothing to achieve their aims. We must not be held hostage to their

devious designs. Individually and collectively, we must step up our efforts to combat the threat of international terrorism in its many manifestations. No country can succeed on its own. Only by working collaboratively can we be successful.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by The Right Honourable Hubert Alexander Ingraham, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

The Right Honourable Hubert Alexander Ingraham, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency The Right Honourable Hubert Alexander Ingraham, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Ingraham (Bahamas): On behalf of the Government and people of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, I congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Assembly at its sixty-third session, and I assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation. I should also like to take this opportunity to commend Mr. Kerim on his stewardship of the Assembly at its sixty-second session, which has just concluded.

The Bahamas commends the Secretary-General for this opportunity to assess our global commitment. We first committed ourselves to the creation of a society for all in 1995. Five years later, we recommitted ourselves to that objective and signed on to the development agenda, a noble objective. We are now at the halfway point, and we must judge for ourselves whether the progress made has been good enough. We believe that efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and ultimately create a society for all must be carried out in tandem with steps to achieve full employment and decent work for all.

The implementation of the MDGs is simply the implementation of my Government's philosophy and programmes. It is with considerable satisfaction, therefore, that I am able to report that the Bahamas has achieved many of the MDG targets and indicators. Over a two-year period, assistance to the poor in the Bahamas and to low-income families is being increased by 45 per cent.

The issue of international migration and development is of particular concern to the Bahamas. We have been burdened for some 60 years now with irregular and unauthorized migration, which places increased demands upon the education, health and social services of the Bahamas. It also represents potential national security threats, particularly as organized crime networks have become increasingly involved in the cross-border smuggling of illicit drugs, firearms and human cargoes. Therefore, the Bahamas looks forward to the discussion scheduled to take place during this session on the follow-up to the 2006 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development.

New and emerging problems continue to slow global development, and the current food, energy and financial crises threaten to erode the gains made over the past 10 years towards ending poverty, hunger and malnutrition and reducing deaths. Apart from the consequential increase in production costs for all consumer goods, the growing cost of energy is affecting the travel plans of many, with direct negative consequences for tourism, the primary industry of the Bahamas.

Of equal concern is the persistent challenge of climate change, especially for small island developing States such as the Bahamas, where 80 per cent of our landmass is within 1.5 metres of sea level. It is no surprise to find the Bahamas listed among the 100 countries most vulnerable to the consequences of climate change and sea-level rise. Potential impacts of further rises in temperature include not only the environmental degradation of marine and terrestrial ecosystems — loss of biodiversity and compromised

groundwater tables, agricultural lands and fishery resources — but also the social and economic losses that might be expected from labour displacement.

My Government has recorded its commitment to preserve our marine and terrestrial environments and to meet the targets established by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity for 2010 and 2012. Indeed, we fully expect to exceed our commitment to conserve at least 20 per cent of the near-shore marine resources across the Bahamas by 2020. That reality informs the Bahamas' desire for urgent action on climate change.

The increasing number and fury of tropical storms and hurricanes passing through the Caribbean are, I believe, yet another indication of the negative effects of global climate change. This year alone, those tropical storms and hurricanes have had a devastating effect on a number of countries in our subregion, including the island of Inagua in the southern Bahamas, Cuba, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, the Turks and Caicos Islands and Haiti. They pose a singularly peculiar threat to our countries, as they are capable, literally in one fell swoop, of wiping out all the development gains we have achieved over many years of hard work.

That is especially true for Haiti, where conditions are especially grim. The Bahamas is pleased that the United Nations has remained actively engaged in Haiti. The Bahamas commends the work of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. As the current Chair of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, I am pleased that the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has been able to contribute to the relief efforts in Haiti, but Haiti's needs remain at proportions that can be addressed only by the international community. We are heartened by the flash appeal for Haiti under the auspices of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The current global economic climate presents a formidable challenge to both developed and developing countries. The Bahamas has established a comparative and competitive advantage in a number of international service industries by laying a solid foundation based upon the rule of law, with its attendant protection of private property rights, combined with sound macroeconomic policies and a commitment to democratic ideals that foster an enduring political stability.

Our participation in the international economic, financial and trading systems has permitted us to embrace opportunities presented by globalization and to achieve reasonable levels of growth and development. Nevertheless, we remain vulnerable to the challenges posed by our size and the limits on our representation in global governance.

The Bahamas supports the strengthening of the United Nations Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters and its upgrade to an intergovernmental body. It is the view of the Bahamas that international tax matters, including issues of importance to developing countries that are not adequately addressed in other organizations, should be discussed in an open, transparent and inclusive forum. For that and other important reasons the Bahamas calls for the convening of a major international conference to review the international financial and monetary architecture and global economic governance structures. The case of small developing countries must be addressed in the context of international systems that are fair, equitable, objective, open and inclusive. Therefore, effective permanent representation of developing countries, particularly small developing countries, is needed in the international economic, trade and financial institutions, including the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization, as well as other bodies, such as the Financial Stability Forum.

The Bahamas reaffirms its support for the intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform with a view to expanding the membership of that body in both the permanent and non-permanent categories, as well as improving its working methods. International peace and security is important to us all. The Bahamas fully supported the General Assembly's adoption of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in September 2006 as a framework for collective action to prevent and combat terrorism.

The Bahamas condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and we call for, and commit to, the full implementation of a culture of peace, justice and human development and respect for all religions and cultures. I am pleased to report my Government's ratification, since taking office last year, of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, the International Convention on the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime — the Palermo

Convention — and its Protocols. The Bahamas commends the Secretary-General's initiative in organizing the first-ever United Nations Symposium on Supporting Victims of Terrorism.

Escalating acts of crime and violence, civil unrest, wars and internal conflicts around the world continue to threaten our efforts to create a just and peaceful international environment. The 2008 World Drug Report indicates that the supply of illicit drugs is increasing. That has serious consequences for our subregion. The Bahamas and members of CARICOM are neither significant producers nor suppliers of narcotics. We are neither manufacturers nor suppliers of small arms and light weapons. Yet the meteoric rise in the illicit trafficking in drugs, small arms and light weapons, illegal migration and human trafficking through our subregion creates a formidable challenge to the national security and socio-economic growth and development of our countries. Therefore, the Bahamas reiterates the call made by CARICOM last July for the illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons to be addressed in a holistic, transparent and legally binding manner, with renewed commitments for effective and enhanced safeguards.

We are poised to mark, on 10 December, one of the greatest achievements of this great Organization: the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Bahamas reaffirms its commitment to the fundamental principles of human rights, dignity and freedom for all. The Bahamas commends the entering into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

For more than six decades, human rights, poverty and development and peace and security have attracted the attention of this Assembly. The complexity of those issues, coupled with a lack of good governance and political sensitivity, has too often impeded meaningful advances. As we celebrate the Declaration's sixtieth anniversary, I recall the vision of a former First Lady of the United States of America, Eleanor Roosevelt, as expressed in her address on 8 March 1960:

> "We are going to have to work for a peaceful world continuously, without stopping because differences exist among people. They exist in families, they exist within nations and they will exist in the world. And therefore, without any question you are going to have to work to achieve peace in the world much more continuously than you have ever worked."

That is as true today as it was 48 years ago.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas for the statement he has just made.

The Right Honourable Hubert Alexander Ingraham, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by His Excellency Mr. Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

His Excellency Mr. Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): At the outset, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines expresses its solidarity with the people of Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica and the United States of America, who have been savagely battered in quick succession by Hurricanes Gustav, Hanna and Ike. Within the Caribbean and our America, the heroism, bravery and resilience of the Cuban, Haitian and Jamaican people and ordinary Americans are a well-documented source of pride to us all. We wish you all, the afflicted nations and peoples, a speedy recovery, and we stand with you in your rebuilding efforts.

Allow me to express my pleasure in noting that the presidency of the General Assembly is now held by a man whose native shores are kissed by the magnificent Caribbean Sea. I am comforted by the knowledge that he has a full appreciation of the

majesty of our landscape and seascape, the opportunities and challenges facing our region, and the nobility of our Caribbean civilization. Mr. President, your dream that another world is possible, as courageously outlined in your inaugural presidential statement, is both timely and prescient. I wholeheartedly endorse your call for frankness, democratization and a focus on the needs of the poor, all under the redemptive and transformative rubric of love and solidarity with our fellow human beings.

It is in that spirit of love and frankness that I come before the Assembly today. In all candour, I must affirm what you, Mr. President, have already concluded: that the United Nations, as the supreme multilateral institution of a profoundly troubled and iniquitous world, can and must do more, in the form of decisive action, to improve the condition of our planet, the living conditions of the less fortunate and the safety of our global family.

The late Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia once stated:

> "Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most that has made it possible for evil to triumph."

There can be no doubt that the right-thinking and civilized peoples of the world are aware of the challenges facing us and of the path to peace, prosperity, and progress upon which we must collectively embark. However, the work that we have entrusted to the United Nations is compromised by apathy and inaction by too many of us and by the crippling pursuit of narrow self-interest by a handful of powerful countries. In this session, we have an historic opportunity to reassert the relevance and credibility of this body by keeping the promises that we have made to ourselves and the world.

The United Nations is charged with tackling the weighty problems that beset the world, not with the refinement of the art of impotent diplomacy. I have no doubt that the principles concealed in the language of "mandate review", "system-wide coherence" and "revitalization" are important, and doubly so to the professional diplomats who look inward rather than outward and who lose sight of the forest for the trees in their endless quest to choreograph the dancing of ever more angels on the head of a pin.

One year ago, I stood at this very podium and denounced the failure of the international community to end the genocide in Darfur. One year ago, there were promising, though belated, signs that the United Nations was finally beginning to act decisively in this regard. One year ago, I stated that "the force on the ground is still insufficient, its mandate is ambiguous and its emerging presence is years too late" (A/62/PV.10, p. 15). Today, one year later, I am shocked by our collective failures in Darfur. Last month, Force Commander Martin Luther Agwai compared his role to that of a boxer in the ring with his hands tied behind his back, because his promised force of 26,000 personnel is still less than 10,000 strong.

I thus reflect as to whether our promises of "never again" and our commitments to the memories of one million Rwandans mean anything, as the blood of hundreds of thousands of Africans again stains the soil of the continent and our collective conscience. As a people whose past and future are inextricably interwoven with the continent, we, the citizens of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, ask ourselves, in the words of the Caribbean Nobel Laureate from Saint Lucia, Derek Walcott, "How can I face such slaughter and be cool?! How can I turn from Africa and live?" The conflict in Darfur is over five years old, and the time has long since past for genuine international action to halt that unspeakable human tragedy.

While I congratulate the General Assembly on finally clearing the way towards intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform, it cannot be an illusory or insincere process. The credibility of the decisions made by the United Nations in the name of peace and security hinges on the existence of a Security Council that is democratic and representative of the regional and development diversity of our body.

As we are all well aware, the scarcities and escalating prices of basic foodstuffs have already led to riots and political instability worldwide and within our own Caribbean Community. While Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has confronted the crisis with a creative national food production plan that mixes agricultural incentives with education and assistance, our local measures are only ameliorative and cannot totally insulate us from what is largely an imported problem.

We are again buffeted by the winds of unequal trade liberalization, in which the agricultural subsidies of developed States force our own nascent

agro-industries into an uncompetitive demise. We are witness to a world where crops are grown to feed cars while people starve, and where climate change ruins age-old farming and fishing livelihoods. The so-called food crisis that we now face is but a symptom of deeper structural flaws in our global economic system and consumerist culture. It represents the human face at the confluence of countless systemic flaws and poorly conceived strategies, including trade barriers, the mad rush to biofuels, adverse climate changes and anaemic development assistance. Any meaningful attempt to alleviate the suffering of the poor and hungry people of the world must start with those systemic issues and resist the urge to treat the symptoms while ignoring the disease and its causes.

The banana farmers of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continue their heroic struggles to eke out a living in the face of international corporate greed, thinly disguised as principled globalization. Our farmers, tradesmen and private sector are still waiting for the oft-promised opportunities that supposedly accompany globalization. However, the evidence to date suggests that the international community has inadvertently institutionalized and entrenched poverty within a system of global winners and losers. The ironically titled Doha Development Round looks less and less like a negotiating process and more and more like a suicide pact within which the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the major economic Powers want everything and concede little or nothing to the poor and developing nations of the world.

The solutions to our economic crises hinge upon genuine negotiation and compromise in the interests of the world's least privileged. We are ill-served by benign neglect, unequal enforcement and concepts of welfare colonialism. The recent troubles in the world's premier financial and banking countries exacerbate the profound challenges facing developing nations.

Six years ago, world leaders gathered in Mexico and gave birth to the Monterrey Consensus, in which they pledged their objective to eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth and promote sustainable development as we advance to a fully inclusive and equitable global economic system. I prayed at the time that the Conference would not devolve into a dragon's dance upon a decorous platform of the finest diplomatic language which few are determined to embrace for action.

Six years later, Monterrey is remembered as the site of grand, unfulfilled commitments to the developing world, much as Africa recalls the empty promises of Gleneagles. The four decade-old promise to devote 0.7 per cent of gross national income to official development assistance remains more illusion than reality. Countries like ours are therefore forced to scour the globe for friends willing to partner with us for the development of our people, while others would rather sit in judgement of our development decisions and priorities than rise to offer a helping hand.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines once again pleads with the international community to be cognizant of the plight of Taiwan's 23 million people. Even though the United Nations historical neglect of the Taiwan issue has not been a source of pride, the Government of Taiwan has acted responsibly and without confrontation to subordinate many of its legitimate political claims into efforts aimed at reducing cross-Strait tensions, promoting peace and building relations with the People's Republic of China.

The United Nations must now act to ensure the survival of that fledgling rapprochement. Taiwan should be encouraged on its path to peace by permitting its meaningful participation in the specialized agencies of the United Nations. Much as Taiwan's vibrant economy is recognized through its participation in WTO, there is no compelling reason why its equally vibrant people should be denied participation in the World Health Organization and other specialized agencies.

The Caribbean is in the midst of its annual hurricane season and the awesome winds, sea surges and torrential rains of Gustav, Hanna and Ike have brought the issue of climate change into sharp relief. It is a matter of life and death to the people of the Caribbean and other small island developing States. Similarly, the cost of adaptation to the changes wrought by our industrialized brothers and sisters must be borne adequately and responsibly by those who have so profoundly altered our global environment.

Hurricanes remind us in the Caribbean of our existential oneness. Accordingly, the effort of Caribbean nations to fashion a more perfect union is to be fully supported as a vital strategic necessity.

The geographic happenstance that has placed the innocent people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in the path of increasingly intense storms has also located

us unfortunately between the supply and demand that fuel much of the West's narcotics trade. As a result, our scarce resources are increasingly being diverted to stem the tide of drugs and small arms flowing through our region.

To the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, disarmament means not the eradication of nuclear weapons, which we lack the will and resources to build, but the elimination of small arms, which threaten to shoot holes in the fabric of our democracy and compromise the values of our civilization. We are assailed by guns, which we do not build, and by deadly narcotics such as cocaine, which we do not produce. The United Nations must act to protect the innocent victims of the world from the scourge of small arms and light weapons.

In recent months, I have been profoundly troubled by the creeping return of cold war rhetoric to the language of international and hemispheric discourse. In this globalized and interconnected world, it is no longer possible to divide the planet into competing hemispheres or to completely quarantine or indeed blockade ideological foe from friend. We must guard against the return of discarded philosophies and learn from the recent past, in which developing countries were used as pawns and proxies for the hegemonic ambitions of others.

Our multipolar experiment is too young for the developing and globalizing world to return to the old rhetoric and recriminations that invariably blossom into violence and death, most often visited on the peoples of developing countries. It is my sincere prayer that this body will hew more closely to the principles of multilateralism and the sovereign equality of all States, and resist any pressures for the United Nations to devolve into a playground for the triumphalist ambitions of presumptive super-Powers.

Mr. President, you sit at the helm of a body entrusted with the well-being and safekeeping of humanity. We have gradually strayed from the noblest of our goals and increasingly paid only lip service to problems that are well within our ability to solve. In countless spheres, we have promised action. Let us now keep those promises for the good of our global family.

The poetic summation of the American poet Robert Frost is apt:

> "I shall be telling this with a sigh
> Somewhere ages and ages hence:
> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
> I took the one less travelled by,
> and that has made all the difference."

Let us choose with courage the road less travelled by. Each of us can make a difference, accordingly.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Abbas (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly for this session. We wish you every success and express our confidence that you will continue to pursue the great mission undertaken by the United Nations, which constitutes a monumental achievement in the history of humankind towards the promotion of dialogue and understanding and the resolution of issues and conflicts. That mission continues to be carried out in accordance with the rules and principles of international law, including humanitarian law, and on the basis of covenants that are consistent with the spirit of the times and the needs of the Organization in resolving problems and conflicts and confronting the enormous challenges before us, including poverty, hunger, the environment and climate change.

On this occasion, I also wish to commend the role and positive contributions of your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, during the sixty-second session of the General Assembly. I would also like to express our deep appreciation for the efforts, positions and initiatives of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. They reflect his foresight and pragmatism regarding the various issues before us and in all regions that are suffering crises and that pose threats to world peace, including in particular in the Middle East region.

I highly value the Secretary-General's understanding of the need to address the political and humanitarian issues concerning the Palestinian people and our region, along with the important role that continues to be played by various United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which continues to shoulder great burdens, especially in the Gaza Strip and in the refugee camps in the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. In the absence of such a continuous, outstanding role, we would have suffered even more severe and perilous crises than we have experienced to date.

This year, I should have liked to bear news of the achievement of a comprehensive agreement between us and our Israeli neighbours, bringing an end to the Israeli occupation of our land since 1967 and to the suffering of the millions of our people living as refugees and displaced persons in exile from their homeland. I believe that the entire world, with its differing alliances and trends, shares that desire with me, especially following the Annapolis conference late last year and the relaunching of the political process. That set the necessary guidelines for the advancement of negotiations towards the conclusion of a comprehensive and complete agreement on all final status issues. Such an agreement would lead to the realization of peace within our region and allow it to enter a qualitatively new era of relations characterized by good-neighbourliness, mutual recognition, security and open borders, and not by walls and barriers.

I am certain that never in the history of the conflict in our region have so many countries gathered as those that attended the Annapolis conference or participated in the consensus that arose there. Those who met not only demanded vigorous action to accelerate and advance negotiations towards the achievement of a final peace agreement, but also explicitly emphasized the need to remove all of the obstacles that have continuously impeded the negotiating process and cast doubt on its credibility, usefulness and ability to actually resolve all aspects of the conflict. The main obstacle I refer to is that of the Israeli settlement campaign and its continuation throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in East Jerusalem.

All of the participants in Annapolis took a united, firm and unprecedented stand calling for the immediate cessation of illegal settlement activities. It was recognized that this was a prerequisite for allowing the negotiations to resolve the conflict to lead to an end to the occupation and the grave, historical injustices inflicted on our people over the long decades.

The participation of most brotherly Arab countries in the Annapolis conference was not merely a symbolic gesture. On the contrary, their participation, in terms of both the level of attendance and the substance of positions, was a reflection of their genuine desire to embrace and support the political process and to address it in real earnest on the basis of the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Arab summit in Beirut in 2002.

Allow me, from this rostrum to recall once again the special importance of the Arab peace initiative. I do this personally in order to draw attention to the significance of each of its platforms, because it represents a major joint Arab undertaking and offers a historic opportunity for us to achieve peace, security and mutual recognition for all.

Indeed, it is strange to hear comments, which we do not understand or accept, that are used to justify the continuing settlements in East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory and refer to the land as if it were not occupied territory or as if peace were possible without an end to the occupation of all of the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including the occupied Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Sheba'a Farms, and without an end to the occupation of East Jerusalem, the capital of our future Palestinian State and a city holy to hundreds of millions of the faithful of the monotheistic religions.

For the purpose of the noble and peaceful objectives of building of a new Middle East free of destructive mindsets and irrational tendencies that run counter to the highest human values preached by all religions and creeds — a new Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction — we have been and remain committed to international legitimacy. We extend our hands for dialogue and negotiation to resolve the conflict in a way that provides all that is required for coexistence and openness to the future so we can build our societies and nations in accordance with the aspirations of our peoples to progress and in the spirit of the times.

In that context, we express our full support for the continuation of the indirect talks currently taking place between Syria and Israel with the help of sisterly

Turkey. We hope that the process will culminate in the achievement of justice, the implementation of international resolutions and the affirmation of international legitimacy.

For our part, we will continue to strive to achieve the maximum possible progress in the current negotiations between us and Israel through this year, benefiting from past experience and relying on the desire of all our peoples to realize a genuine and comprehensive peace that will end decades of occupation and hostilities and result in the attainment of the two-State solution — the State of Palestine living alongside the State of Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders — and a just and agreed solution to the plight of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III). In referring to the benefits of past experience, I wish to convey clearly that partial or interim solutions or the dropping or deferral of those core issues are unacceptable and unviable and will maintain the roots of the conflict, thus undermining any achievement on the road to peace. The solution must be comprehensive, complete, detailed and wholehearted.

The solution we aspire to must include a mechanism to ensure its full and faithful implementation pursuant to the timetable agreed upon. All that inevitably requires international supervision of the implementation of the solution, as well as a more effective role for the international Quartet in safeguarding the solution we will reach and an effective guarantor role for the Security Council and various other United Nations bodies.

At this juncture, I would like to express our appreciation for the role played by the United States Administration, President George Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in advancing the negotiations and the peace process, as well as their efforts to remove the obstacles that stand in its way. I also wish to commend the positions taken by the Arab, Islamic and non-aligned countries, which have always taken firm stances in support of a just peace. I would like to express our appreciation for the role played by the European Union, which has supported our efforts in every possible way, and the role and positions of the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China and Japan, as well as of our friends and colleagues in Latin America and Africa who have always supported the advancement and continuity of the political process.

As humankind celebrates the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the conditions being endured by our people are increasingly severe and complex. Our nation, which possesses only a small area of land, continues to suffer the fragmentation and discontiguity of its cities and villages as a result of more than 600 checkpoints and roadblocks on all main and secondary roads. There is no precedent for that in modern history. The harshest and most painful of those barriers are those that have surrounded occupied East Jerusalem, severing the link between it and its Palestinian surroundings, not to mention changing the Islamic and Christian character of our city.

Attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian civilians have become daily occurrences. At the same time, ongoing tragedies strike every Palestinian family with the continuing detention and imprisonment of over 11,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails. I know of no situation in today's world comparable to ours, where a people is subject to the detention of such large numbers of its civilians and where prisons continue to be filled with more and more accused who are guilty only of wanting to be free and of envisioning a future that is different from the reality of occupation, siege and the loss of hope.

Despite those harsh circumstances, our National Authority and governing institutions have exerted every possible effort to improve our conditions in all fields, including the security, economic, education, health and cultural sectors.

I wish to express our gratitude to our brothers in the Arab countries, to the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, and to the whole international community for all the important assistance extended to our people and our Authority in all aspects of the endeavour to restore the Palestinian economy, provide real opportunities for its advancement, and rebuild the Palestinian security apparatus and the various institutions and agencies of the Palestinian Authority.

In that regard, I wish to convey special thanks and appreciation to all the envoys from other countries who have provided assistance in several fields, particularly Mr. Tony Blair, the Quartet Special Envoy. It is with pride that I can say that, even under those most difficult conditions we have been able to achieve security, the rule of law and public order for most of

our towns and districts, despite all the remaining obstacles we have to confront.

However, we will continue to follow that same path with firm determination and resolve. In that connection, the Paris Donor's Conference, followed by the Bethlehem economic conference, were two special occasions in support of our national economy, our financial and economic institutions and treasury, and assistance to the Palestinian private sector, which has unwaveringly borne heavy burdens over the past years and has not failed to develop and progress.

There is no doubt that the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip, where unemployment is endemic, is compounding the tragic humanitarian crisis there. It is unprecedented in scope and scale, and the opportunities for education and medical care are scarce, punishing and causing the malnutrition of an entire generation with all the consequent risks for the future of the entire people.

All of that is in addition to the transformation of the Gaza Strip into a huge virtual prison holding nearly 1.5 million Palestinians. We have exerted all efforts to get the siege on Gaza lifted, this dear part of our homeland. In that regard, we express our deep appreciation for the role played by the brotherly Arab countries, especially Egypt, to alleviate the suffering and to help us save our people from the extremely difficult situation they find themselves in, including in particular their efforts to end the division resulting from the bloody coup led by Hamas against Palestinian legitimacy more than a year ago.

As I have on more than one occasion, I would like to reaffirm once again from this rostrum that we will spare no effort to achieve Palestinian national reconciliation. We have already announced a preliminary plan that opens the door for this reconciliation to be realized and the formation of an independent, impartial Government that is acceptable to all, but that will not place us back under siege again. This Government will prepare for the holding of legislative and presidential elections. We will continue building a security apparatus based on professional tenets, with the support of Arab security. After the completion of those steps, it will be possible for us to proceed further towards strengthening our reconciliation and deepening the participation of all. If that is not actualized, whoever rejects those principles and does not conform with them must bear the responsibility before our entire people and before the Arab and international positions that reject this disintegration and division.

In concluding my statement, I recall the words of our great Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, whom we recently lost and whose loss was that of a great cultural and humanitarian symbol and icon. Mahmoud Darwish glorified life and cherished his homeland, calling on our new generations to love life on their land and to preserve its continuity and to keep the torch always lit. Mahmoud Darwish said,

> "On this land there is something that deserves life, on this land there was first the beginning and the end — a land called Palestine — a name that was and is and will endure".

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on Her Excellency Ursula Plassnik, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria.

Ms. Plassnik (Austria): These days, on our television screens, images of thousands of parents concerned about the health of their babies and children remind us of what lies at the very heart of our work — building a better future for the coming generations, at home as well as here in the United Nations.

Armed conflict, climate change, poverty, hunger and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are the bleak challenges we face today, together with new global challenges such as increasing food and energy prices and financial turbulence. A sense of shared responsibility and true partnership based on equality are the key qualities that must guide our efforts to meet these challenges.

All inhabitants of the global village have the right as well as the duty to contribute to the well-being of our community. At the global level, that needs to be done in the framework of an effective world organization that enjoys the trust of States and Governments but also of societies and individual citizens.

A just and effective international order needs to be based on rules equally applicable to every member, big or small, strong or weak. Respect for the rule of law is indispensable if we want to prevent conflicts and promote peace and sustainable development. Austria has therefore consistently promoted efforts to develop international relations based on the principles of the

Charter of the United Nations and all the other instruments that form our international legal system.

Three weeks ago, 130 human rights experts and practitioners from around the world came together in Vienna 15 years after the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993. They formulated recommendations on how to overcome the gap between human rights standards and the reality of their implementation on the ground. Those recommendations have been submitted to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, and I hope they will contribute to the deliberations on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December.

One of the basic threats to the rule of law is impunity. Today, international criminal justice, as dispensed by the International Criminal Court as well as by the special tribunals established by the Security Council, has become a major tool for bringing to justice those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Nowadays, some speak about the "peace — justice dilemma". I personally remain convinced that peace and justice are complementary objectives, both are equally essential. There can be no lasting peace without justice, and international justice will serve its purpose most fully and effectively if it helps societies advance reconciliation and overcome the wounds of the past. As women and children are often the most vulnerable in our societies, they deserve our special attention in this context.

No country, no society can succeed without recognizing the contribution of women. Worldwide, women are the politically and socially most relevant emerging power of the twenty-first century. Their contribution must be valued publicly, their participation encouraged, their potential fully used. There are countless success stories of women leaders who make a difference in their communities as businesswomen, mothers, teachers, farmers, workers, peacemakers and lawmakers.

At the same time, we hear appalling reports from around the world of discrimination and violence against women. How can we speak of human rights for women as long as one out of every three women worldwide has been beaten or abused? It is the responsibility of each and every Government to act on this. The United Nations must take the lead by setting clear targets and establishing a network to share best practices in combating violence against women.

Last year, the Women Leaders Network called on the Secretary-General to appoint more women to leadership positions in the United Nations, in particular in mediation and peacebuilding. I am pleased that the Secretary-General has since entrusted a number of outstanding women with key positions both at Headquarters and in the field, and I encourage him to continue this policy.

With regard to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the European Union (EU) policy of targeted support for women in and through peace missions could be extended to other regional organizations such as the African Union. To assess the practical results of resolution 1325 (2000), I propose a thorough review process on the occasion of its tenth anniversary in 2010.

Recent events in Georgia are a stark reminder that the scourge of war still haunts our European neighbourhood. The European Union is ready to work together with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the United Nations so that Georgia can return to peace, all internally displaced people can return safely and a lasting solution based on full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia is found. I also call upon the Security Council to decide on a timely prolongation of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia.

As for the Western Balkans, I am heartened that we are moving from the crisis management phase to the integration phase. Today, thanks to the stabilizing role of the EU, the peoples of the Western Balkans enjoy peace. Their future lies in the European Union.

Austria welcomes the progress recently achieved in Zimbabwe. We hope that this will become another lasting example of the capacity of Africa for the peaceful resolution of conflicts on its continent. Regional ownership is the best option for success.

Austria continues to actively support efforts to bring an end to decades of conflict in the Middle East. Three months ago, we hosted a donor conference in Vienna for the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon in order to improve the fate of the Palestinian refugees there and to support

stability, the rule of law and economic development in Lebanon.

I commend the Israeli and Palestinian leadership for their commitment to dialogue and negotiations despite repeated efforts by radical forces to undermine the process started in Annapolis nearly a year ago. Ongoing settlements and expansion, however, put our common vision in question. The two-State solution remains the only possible path towards a peaceful and prosperous Middle East that can provide lasting security to all its inhabitants.

I remain convinced that in international relations as inside our own societies, we must always support dialogue. Austria will continue her long-standing commitment to the dialogue of cultures and religions with a clear focus on the contribution of religious leaders, women, young people, the media and educators.

With some 500,000 victims each year, small arms and light weapons are today's real weapons of mass destruction. Africa is the continent most heavily affected by this problem. Together with her African partners, Austria works for real progress on the destruction of small arms as well as on the fight against the illicit arms trade. We also cooperate in developing suitable legal instruments.

Austria is also deeply involved in establishing an international legally binding ban on cluster munitions. The Convention on Cluster Munitions that we adopted in Dublin this year is a milestone in the field of disarmament and humanitarian law. Austria will sign the Convention in Oslo on 3 December 2008. I appeal to all other countries to sign as soon as possible so that this treaty can enter into force swiftly.

The need to prevent nuclear proliferation at a time when an increasing number of countries are looking towards nuclear power as a means to produce energy calls for courageous and creative solutions. Austria has presented a proposal in the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that aims at the comprehensive multilateralization of the nuclear fuel cycle. The goal is a fair system under which all States who wish to receive nuclear fuel for an exclusively peaceful use can do so under equal conditions through the IAEA.

With regard to the Iranian nuclear programme, we are convinced that the double-track approach is the best way forward. At the same time, it is indispensable that Iran fully complies with the relevant Security Council resolutions. In this context we commend and strongly support the efforts of the IAEA Director General, Mohamed El Baradei.

Let me draw the Assembly's attention to the new partnership we developed and adopted at the Lisbon Summit in December 2007: the Joint Africa-European Union Strategy based on the three aims of peace, security and development. Without peace and security there can be no sustainable development, and there is no security without human security. Human trafficking, drugs, proliferation of weapons, unemployment and crime — they all affect the very cohesion of our societies.

In order to better address the challenges faced by Africa, Austria, together with the Economic Community of West African States and the Southern African Development Community, respectively, recently organized a conference on peace and security in West Africa, in Ouagadougou, and a seminar on peace and development in Southern Africa, in Johannesburg.

We need the turbo power of innovation to address global challenges. Climate change is not only responsible for natural disasters but poses what is perhaps the most serious threat to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For some small island States climate change and the resulting sea level rise are threats to their very existence. Austria therefore welcomes the initiative by the Pacific island States for a General Assembly resolution on the threat of climate change to international peace and security. Urgent action towards a global climate agreement by the end of 2009 is the only way forward. We also propose to develop the United Nations Environment Programme into a fully fledged World Environment Organization. Furthermore, we support the creation of a new International Renewable Energy Agency. Vienna is a suitable location to host such an agency, as many of its United Nations offices already deal with energy questions.

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger continues to be one of the main challenges of the international community. At the midpoint towards 2015, success in achieving the Millennium Development Goals has been uneven. While many countries have made significant progress in attaining

some of the Goals, only a few are likely to reach all of them. Urgent and increased efforts by the international community are, therefore, needed. The active contribution towards this global effort is a priority for the Austrian Government.

As a matter of urgency we also have to tackle the multiple and complex causes of the current global food crisis. We welcome the High-Level Task Force set up by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, which aims to create an international strategy for food security, and we eagerly await the first concrete results.

Small and medium-sized countries have a specific interest in an international system based on effective multilateralism and the rule of law. They form the backbone of the United Nations. They can make a difference and act as a driving force on many issues beneficial to the world community.

Since joining the United Nations more than 50 years ago, Austria has consistently worked for multilateral solutions to global challenges. Our candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council is one expression of our determination to serve the world Organization. That is the most important responsibility that can be entrusted to a Member of the United Nations. We stand ready to assume that responsibility and ask Members for their support. We pledge to work for common solutions to our common global challenges in a sense of true partnership.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Samuel Santos López, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Nicaragua.

Mr. Santos López (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Nicaragua — cradle of Rubén Darío and Augusto C. Sandino, the home of a people firmly committed to their principle, their efforts for a better world and their calling for universal peace — I extend the brotherly greeting of our President, Comandante Daniel Ortega Saavedra, and of all our authorities and citizens.

Listening to the words of the representatives of the States taking part in this sixty-third session of the General Assembly, we find that we have a common vision of the major serious problems affecting all humankind today. In particular, we agree on the urgent need to act as one in facing those problems and solving them successfully, once and for all, for the benefit of those who inhabit planet Earth.

Hunger, poverty, the high cost of oil and food, the tragic consequences of climate change, terrorism, the urgent need to observe human rights worldwide, the trafficking of and trade in persons, drug trafficking and civil insecurity are, among other issues, matters that must lead us to focus our attention and our efforts.

At the same time, they are questions that arise from the nature and functioning of our Organization and that call for in-depth consideration so that we can make this Organization more effective and democratic, with sufficient guarantees, and so that all countries of the world represented here can have our interests taken into account, our voices heard and our will expressed in the most transparent and effective way possible.

For Nicaragua, an international system based on the hegemony of a few over the majority is unthinkable. Such an anachronistic system, unjust in its very essence, is the reason for the deep political, economic and social inequality in the world. It is the reason for the accelerated and advanced arms race led by countries that have set themselves up as world referees in situations affecting us all. It is the reason for wars of aggression that behind the smokescreen of the globalization of democracy and the promotion of certain freedoms, illegally and illegitimately appropriate scarce energy and natural resources and lead to the political subjugation and grief of entire peoples deprived of their freedom, national independence and their right to their own development.

The international security situation has become increasingly volatile in various parts of the world, bringing new threats to international peace and security and to peoples' desire for peace. We must act intelligently, cautiously and resolutely to ensure that new fratricidal wars do not assail the world. Therefore, we agree with the priority given by the President of our General Assembly to actions aimed at achieving comprehensive and complete disarmament and nuclear control.

As a country that has fought and continues to fight for its independence, sovereignty and self-determination, and as the victim of military and foreign political intervention several times in its history, Nicaragua understood early on that there was no greater value than freedom. Our national heroes, those who fought in our wars for freedom, are taintless witnesses to the determination of the Nicaraguan people to have a free homeland or death.

The persistence of poverty and inequality in the world today cannot be justified. Hunger and poverty are sapping economic and social progress for future generations. Despite the efforts made in recent years, the gap between the rich and poor has continued to grow, and millions of people now suffer from hunger and live in poverty or in extreme poverty. It is ethically and politically crucial to put an end to that long-standing injustice to so many human beings.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) await greater impetus from countries, primarily those with larger economic resources, and from international financial organizations, which are also called upon to contribute to their accomplishment. Those countries and bodies must clearly demonstrate their genuine political will to achieve all the MDGs and that they are not merely paying lip service to them.

It was established in the Monterrey Consensus, adopted at the International Conference on Financing for Development, that the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations must recognize the needs and interests of developing countries and make them central to the work of the financing for development programme to be reviewed in Doha this year.

By and large, we can say that most donors are not honouring the pledges they made to increase their aid unconditionally. United Nations calculations on the total official development assistance needed between 2010 and 2015 in order to achieve the MDGs amount to some $130 billion per year. However, global arms expenditures in 2007 alone reached some $1.399 trillion, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Today more than ever, the commitment to allocating at least 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance without condition must be honoured so that developing countries can have these resources available for our national priorities.

Nicaragua reiterates that, in order to consolidate our efforts in the coming years to eradicate poverty, extreme poverty, hunger and unemployment, we must first eradicate the unjust relationships among States. Those injustices can be felt most tangibly in unfair and imbalanced trade relations between the rich and the poor countries.

My country calls for a fair international market and fair, democratic and balanced international trade that will contribute to strengthening the economy of our countries, allow us to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and end the criminalization of migration by some receiving countries.

We must ensure the maximum possible economic complementarity among all countries of the world. The developing countries are working hard on that issue in the context of South-South cooperation. We note the successes that have been achieved in very little time in some regions, such as the agreements between some Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas has become a comprehensive platform for cooperation for a number of our countries, complementing their economies. The complementarity we have built seeks to create advantages for our raw materials and agricultural products, as well as for our fishing, mineral and energy resources, to mention but a few. We need complementarity, solidarity and the accelerated transformation of purely economic relationships based on a sense of shared responsibility and unity in the face of the major challenges of the present and the future.

Nothing could be further from that spirit than unbridled capitalism, which is speculative and inefficient and has led the world economy into a serious crisis the effects of which, according to some experts, we are only just beginning to feel, as we have seen recently in the United States financial system.

Just a few hours ago, the President of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, told the world press that the United States financial crisis will have a severe effect on development assistance, primarily that earmarked for the poorest countries. In other words, the crisis in the financial system will have serious repercussions on our peoples. The same solutions being sought to avoid collapse will need to include measures to ensure that our peoples are not affected by a crisis that we have not brought on ourselves but that we may pay for with worsening poverty and a further delay in our development.

We have also seen that multilateralism in international relations is a means to achieve mutually respectful relationships and peaceful coexistence and to implement development policies based on our own realities. In that conviction, we have been actively committed to the principles and objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement. The reconciliation and national unity Government of Nicaragua, presided over by

President Daniel Ortega Saavedra, is firmly committed to that vision of the world and is working hand in hand with the people to rebuild a country that, after almost two decades of neoliberalism following a decade of unjust war that was firmly condemned by the International Court of Justice, was in a state of political, social and economic collapse.

Our Government seeks to overcome poverty and to transform Nicaragua through a new alternative model of development that is more just and a new power structure that is truly democratic. Citizens will play a leading role in carrying out that task and will directly redefine the path of the country in line with their own interests.

We propose to improve the quality of life of our people by basing our policies on principles to defend the environment and nature and to conserve our natural heritage. We must establish a participatory new world environmental order with clearly set goals that puts an end to the commercial and utilitarian exploitation of our planetary resources that, as has now been proven, are being depleted at an uncontrollable rate. Those efforts must also include the commitment of the countries that are the largest emitters of the greenhouse gases that have resulted in global warming and have already had other negative and irreversible effects on the planet.

We are also focusing on the development of food sovereignty as a means of feeding our people through our own domestic efforts and through unconditional solidarity with brotherly peoples. At the same time, food security will guarantee that every Nicaraguan has reliable access to nutritious food at a fair cost so as to lead a healthy and active life.

We are developing programmes to eradicate hunger and profiteering. We are providing low-cost seeds, stoves and butane tanks for low-income families. We are also supporting small businesses and working for the establishment of a bank to encourage production.

For Nicaragua, the word "solidarity" is not an empty concept, but rather the cement of the society we wish to build. With that in mind, I cannot fail to stress at this general debate the solidarity of my people with the Government and people of Bolivia, who have been subject to unacceptable and ongoing attempts to destabilize the country. The indigenous people of Bolivia, led by President Evo Morales, have taught us all a lesson in democracy by defending the democracy that they have gained after years of humiliating marginalization.

Once again, Nicaragua denounces the cruel blockade maintained against Cuba in violation of international law. That pathological obsession against Cuba seems to justify all actions and ignores that country's own problems in combating the terrorism that has been brought from this country to that Caribbean island. The five Cuban patriots who have been jailed in Florida for attempting to prevent terrorist acts against the Cuban people should be set free.

Although it may seem untrue, the process of decolonization is not over. Entire peoples are still oppressed and denied their right to independence and to self-determination. We salute and stand side by side with the people of Puerto Rico and the Western Sahara, with the Polisario Front, and with Argentina in opposition to the occupation of the Malvinas Islands. We also firmly reiterate our call for freedom for the Cypriot people and for putting an end to the partition of that great nation.

We support a comprehensive and peaceful solution in the Middle East that will end once and for all the horrors of war and allow the Palestinian and Israeli people to live as brothers and sisters, and in which the Palestinian people can finally enjoy all of their rights and have a State of their own.

We are convinced that, if we are to achieve the noble objectives embraced by our Organization, we need the true political will to devote time and energy to reviewing our own house. That is even more important in a world of constant change and crisis and requires each of us — our peoples and our States — to be active participants in our own future. As has been said before, we must work together to democratize the United Nations. We are pleased to welcome the proposal of the President of the General Assembly to hold a high-level dialogue on the democratization of the Organization, in which we would consider one by one the pressing problems of and between its various bodies. We are prepared to play a constructive role in that necessary and urgent dialogue.

The times our peoples are facing and the responsibilities we have here in this house will be decisive for millions of people, now and for future generations. It is urgent that we find points of

convergence so that we can work together to meet the challenges of the times and our responsibilities.

The United Nations Charter is a fundamental reference point to guide our action. In respecting the Charter and ensuring that it is respected, we are respecting ourselves. Its principles must prevail over selfish and petty interests. Above all, the future of humankind is at stake.

Nicaragua reaffirms its call for peace and humanism to contribute to a more just, more humane and more united world in which individual destinies, interconnected and inspired by their love of justice and freedom, come together in the universal task of creating a world that is better for all.

As was said yesterday at the high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals, the unjust international order in which we live must change if it is to be credible, legitimate and effective. Fundamental decisions cannot continue to be taken by one, seven or eight stakeholders and without the participation of the vast majority of humankind. Solutions to this situation are well known and well accepted, at least in principle.

Through the millenniums and centuries, our species has developed institutions — and above all, law — in order to govern human relations and to mediate conflicts through peaceful means. More recently, humankind has developed democracy to that end and, in particular, in order to structure power and authority peacefully. Those are the solutions that our species has developed over the millenniums, and it is difficult to imagine another alternative.

The question before us now is whether we have the political will to apply democracy at the international level, beginning by democratizing the United Nations and by strengthening international law within the framework of United Nations institutions. That is the solution. That is what will overcome the chronically postponed solutions to problems and help us to deal efficiently with urgent new problems. It is possible. Why not? We are speaking of human institutions that we ourselves can change. The question is whether or not we have the political will to do so. I propose that we work together at this sixty-third session of the General Assembly to build that political will through increasingly broader progressive consensus.

The meeting rose at 2.10 p.m.